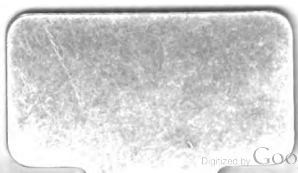
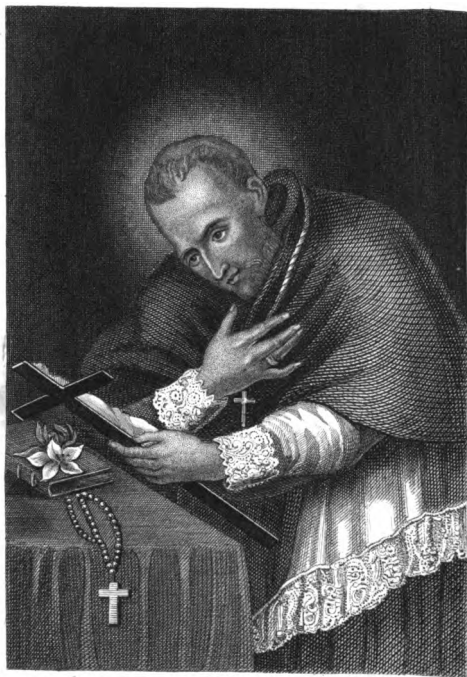


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INSTRUCTIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

Religious State



TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN

OF

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI,

BY

A PRIEST OF THE ORDER OF CHARITY.

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TO
HIS MOST BELOVED
BROTHERS & SISTERS IN CHRIST,
WHO
BY THE GRACE OF GOD HAVE CHOSEN
THE BETTER PART,
AND EMBRACED THE RELIGIOUS LIFE,
THE FOLLOWING TREATISE
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY
THE TRANSLATOR.

PREFACE.

THIS little book is published especially for the advantage of those Christians who have the happiness of being called to the Religious state, or of being already engaged in the profession of the Religious life. The instructions and considerations which it contains are plain and simple, but at the same time they are also full of solid doctrine and of the sacred unction of the Holy Ghost; so that whoever reads them attentively and with a heart piously disposed, will not fail to admire the wonderful affection and heavenly wisdom which they display.

JOHN BAPTIST PAGANI,
PROVINCIAL OF THE ORDER OF CHARITY.

*Ratcliffe College, near Loughborough,
March 17 1848.*

INSTRUCTIONS

ON THE

RELIGIOUS STATE.

INSTRUCTION I.

UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

It is plain that our eternal salvation principally depends on our choice of a state of life. Father Louis of Granada calls it "the main-spring of life." In a watch, if the main-spring is out of order, the whole is injured; so, as regards our salvation, if we fail in following our vocation, our whole life, as St. Gregory Nazianzen says, will be disorderly and wretched. If then we desire to insure our salvation, we must carefully follow the divine inspirations in our choice of that state of life to which God calls us, and in which God has prepared for us the aids which are requisite in order to attain

salvation, for as St. Cyprian says, the gifts of the Holy Ghost attend and depend not upon our own caprice, but upon the will of God.* St. Paul also writes: "every one hath his proper gift from God;"† that is to say, as Cornelius a Lapide explains it, "God gives to each man his vocation, and chooses for him a state in which he designs to save him; and this is according to the order of predestination, described by the same apostle: "Whom he predestinated, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified.....and glorified."‡

We must here observe, that the subject of vocation is considered by most persons in the world as one of trifling importance; and it seems to them to be indifferent whether we live in the state to which God has called us, or in that which we have chosen for ourselves, according to our own fancy—hence so many lead disorderly lives and are lost. Now, it is certain, on the contrary, that upon this principally depends our attaining eternal life.

* Ordine suo, non arbitrio nostro, virtus spiritus sancti ministratur.

† Unusquisque proprium donum habet ex Deo. 1 Cor. vii. 7.

‡ Quos prædestinavit, hos et vocavit, et quos vocavit, hos et justificavit....illos et glorificavit. Rom. viii. 30.

Upon vocation follows justification, upon justification follows glorification, which is eternal life; and he who deranges this order, and breaks this chain of salvation, will fail to save his soul, whatever efforts he may make, or whatever labours he may undergo; and it is to such that Saint Augustine says, "You run well, but you are out of the road."* You are out of the path by which God called you to walk to obtain your salvation.

The Lord does not accept the sacrifices which we offer him according to our own will. To Cain and to his gifts he had no respect.† And he threatens those with the heaviest chastisements who despise His call and follow the counsels of their own hearts instead of following his direction. "Wo to you, apostate children," saith he by the mouth of his prophet, "that you would take counsel, and not of me: and would begin a web, and not by my spirit."‡ The divine vocation to a perfect life is an especial and very precious grace which God does not bestow upon all; and there-

* Bene curris, sed extra viam.

† Ad Cain et ad munera ejus non respexit. Gen. iv. 5.

‡ Vœ, filii desertores, ut faceretis consilium, et non ex me; et ordiremini telam, et non per spiritum meum. Isa. xxx. 1.

fore, he has reason to be displeased with those who despise it. How much would a prince be offended if, having called one of his vassals to his service in preference to a courtier or favourite, this vassal should refuse to obey him? And shall not God resent a similar insult? Ah! he does indeed resent such an injury, and thus he threatens, "Wo to him that gainsayeth his Maker:"* the word, *vo*, signifies in the language of scripture, eternal perdition. The chastisement of the disobedient begins even in this life, in which he never finds rest. Who hath resisted him, says holy Job, and hath lived in peace?† and therefore he fails to receive such special and efficacious graces as God bestows upon his beloved children, and are so necessary in order to persevere in the practice of virtue and to attain eternal life. Hence, as the theologian Habert says, he will with great difficulty save his soul.‡ With great difficulty will he work out his salvation; and like a joint out of the place which it was intended to fill, he can scarcely live a regular

* *Vœ qui contradicit fictori suo.* Isa. xlv. 9.

† *Quis resistit ei, et pacem habuit?* Job, xi. 4.

‡ *Non sine magnis difficultatibus poterit salutem suam consulere.*

life, but will be, like the dislocated limb, in the body of the church, it is true, and performing some of its functions, but with pain and awkwardly.* And he concludes, that although, strictly speaking, he may be enabled to save his soul, yet it will be with great difficulty that he will enter upon the right way and work out his eternal salvation.† We find the same opinion in St. Bernard, and St. Leo. St. Gregory, writing to the emperor Maurice, who, by an edict, had forbidden his soldiers to become religious, said, that it was an unjust law, which closed the gates of Paradise to many, because there are many who cannot be saved unless they leave all things and embrace the religious state. A remarkable case is related by Father Lancizio, of a youth of great talent in the Roman college, who, whilst making a retreat, asked his confessor if it was a sin not to correspond to the vocation to the religious life. The confessor replied, that it was not in itself a grievous sin, for such a vocation was rather a counsel than a command, but that it would greatly endanger his

* *Manebit in corpore Ecclesiae, velut membrum in corpore humano suis sedibus motum, quod servire potest, sed œgre et cum deformitate.*

† *Licet, absolute loquendo, salvari possit, difficulter tamen ingreditur viam et apprehendet media salutis.*

eternal salvation, for many Christians by so doing have lost their souls. The young man however did not obey the call. He went afterwards to pursue his studies at Macerata, where he soon began to neglect the exercise of prayer and of holy communion, and at length gave himself up to a wicked life ; and soon after, as he was one night leaving the house of a woman of bad character, he was mortally wounded by a rival. A priest ran to his assistance, but he expired before the minister of God reached him, and in sight of the college. Thus did God make known the chastisement which is prepared for those who despise their vocation. Another instance is related by F. Pinamonti, of a vision which appeared to a certain novice who was thinking of abandoning the religious life. Jesus Christ himself appeared to him, seated on his throne, and commanded with great severity that his name should be erased from the book of life, which so terrified him that he persevered in his vocation. And how many such examples do we read in the annals of history ! How many miserable young people shall we see condemned at the day of judgment for not having obeyed their vocation !

For those who have rebelled against

the light, (according to the words of the Holy Ghost,)* it seems a just punishment that they should be deprived of the light; and for those who have refused to walk in the way assigned to them by the Lord, preferring one which they have chosen for themselves without light, that they should be lost. "Because you have despised my calling," says the Lord, "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared."† That is to say, God will not listen to the cry of those who despise his voice. St. Augustine says,‡ "Those who have despised the voice of God when it invited them, shall feel the vengeance of his justice for their contempt."

When therefore God calls us to the state of perfection, if we would not endanger our eternal salvation, we must obey, and obey instantly; otherwise we shall be reproached by Jesus Christ, like the young man whom he invited to follow

* *Ipsæ fuerunt rebelles lumini; nec cierunt vias ejus. Job, xxiv. 13.*

† *Quia vocavi et renuistis... despexistis omne consilium meum... ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo, et subsannabo, cum vobis id quod timebatis advenierit. Prov. i. 24, 26.*

‡ *Qui spreverunt voluntatem Dei invitantem, voluntatem Dei sentient vindicantem.*

him: "I will follow thee, Lord," he said, "but first let me go home and renounce those things which I possess." * Upon which Jesus told him that he was not fit for Paradise. "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." †

These lights from God are transient, not permanent; and therefore, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, the divine call to a perfect life should be followed instantly. ‡ The same saint in his Summa proposes this question: Is it right to enter religion without asking the advice of many persons, and without a long deliberation? And he answers in the affirmative, saying, that advice and reflection are needful in *doubtful* affairs; but not in that which regards religious vocation, which is *certainly* good, because it is recommended by our Lord himself in the Gospel; and the religious life is only an exact fulfilment of the counsels of Jesus Christ. And here we must observe a strange and wonderful thing, that when men of the

* Sequar te Domine; sed permette mihi primum renuntiare his quæ domi sunt. Luke, ix. 61.

† Nemo mittens manum ad aratrum et respiciens retrò, aptus est regno Dei.

‡ Quanto citius.

world happen to hear that some person desires to enter into religion, in order to lead a life more perfect, and secure himself from the dangers of sin, they seem to think that it is necessary to deliberate a long time before doing so; they say we must not be in haste, but take time to ascertain whether the vocation comes from God or the devil; but when the question is about accepting some high office, such for instance as a parish or a bishopric, we hear nothing about finding proofs that the call is from God, though such stations bring with them an awful responsibility, and are full of danger as regards the eternal salvation of our souls. How different is the language of the Saints! St. Thomas says, that even if the religious vocation should come from the devil, it ought to be embraced, as an excellent counsel given by an enemy. St. John Chrysostom, followed by St. Thomas, says, that when God calls us, he desires that we should not delay an instant to follow him;* and wherefore, when God beholds in any person prompt obedience, he is so well

* Ad vocationem Domini Petrus et Andreas continuo relictis retibus secuti sunt eum. Talem obedientiam Christus querit à nobis, ut neque instanti temporis moremur. Hom. xxiv. in Matt.

pleased that he opens his hands and fills him with blessings; but on the contrary, when we are slow to obey him he closes his hands and withdraws his light; and then we find it so difficult to follow our vocation that we readily abandon it. Therefore, says the same saint, when the devil cannot turn a person from his resolution to consecrate himself to God, he endeavours to persuade him at least to defer the execution of it; and thinks he has obtained a great deal by engaging him to put it off for a single day, or even for a single hour.* For during that day, or hour, new occasions may arise which may make it less difficult to procure further postponement, so that by degrees the person finding himself grow weaker, and being less assisted by the grace of God, he yields and abandons his vocation. O how often has the enemy of mankind prevailed, by such delays, to deprive of the precious grace of vocation those to whom God has vouchsafed it! Therefore St. Jerome thus exhorts those who are called to the religious life: "Make haste, I beseech thee, hasten to cut rather than loose the cords by which the vessel is

* Si brevem arripuerit prorogationem.

bound.”* This great saint here means to say, that, as in a vessel on the point of sinking, a man would rather think to cut the cords than untie them, so should a man who is in the midst of the world seek to fly from it as soon as possible, that he may escape from the danger of eternal perdition, which is there so easy.

Attend also to what St. Francis of Sales writes concerning religious vocation, for his words will serve to confirm what has been already said, and what will be said hereafter. “In order to have a sign of a good vocation, it is not requisite that we should continue to feel a sensible pleasure in our inferior part, but it suffices that our desire and resolution of devoting ourselves to God, should continue to exist in the superior part of our soul, namely, in our rational will. A person should not believe his vocation false because he does not feel constantly the same sensible movements which he felt when he first thought of entering religion. Nor must he think that he has no real vocation if he should even experience some repugnance, or coldness, or hesitation, or some

* Festina, quæso te et hærenti in solio naviculæ funem magis proscinde, quam solve.

fear of taking a false step. But it is enough if his will still remains firmly determined not to be turned from the voice of God; it is enough if he continue to feel some affection or inclination towards the religious state. If an individual desires to know whether Almighty God wishes him to become a religious, he must not wait till God himself appears to him, or sends an angel from heaven to signify his will; neither the examination of learned men is necessary to decide whether the vocation should be followed or not; but he must answer faithfully to the first movements of inspiration, and cultivate them carefully; he must be firm, and not be discouraged by any dryness and coldness which may come over him; and if he does this, God will not fail to enlighten him ever more and more, and to turn all things to his greatest honour and glory. Nor need we trouble ourselves to discover from whence the first movement came: the Lord has many different ways of calling his servants to him. Sometimes he makes use of sermons, sometimes of the reading of good books; some he calls while listening to the words of the Gospel, as he did St. Anthony and St. Francis; others find in the afflictions and cares of

the world motives for leaving it. Those who come to God out of disgust and hatred of the world, are notwithstanding enabled to give themselves to him with a free and entire will, and sometimes become more perfect and more holy than those who had a more apparent vocation. F. Piatti relates, that a gentleman was going one day on a spirited horse, to display his fine figure in the eyes of a certain lady, whom he was desirous to please, but, being thrown from his horse into the mire, and arising covered with mud and filth, he was so confounded at the accident, that at the moment he took the resolution of becoming a religious; exclaiming, "O deceitful world, thou hast made a jest of me, and, in my turn, I will make a jest of thee; thou hast sported with me, and now will I sport with thee; for I will henceforward have nothing to do with thee; I am resolved to quit thee for a cloister." And he performed his resolution and lived a holy life in religion from that time.

INSTRUCTION II.

ON THE MEANS OF PRESERVING THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

WE have seen that he who desires to obey the divine call must firmly resolve to follow it, and that as soon as possible, if he would avoid the danger of losing it; but, if there be an absolute necessity for deferring to do so, he must take the greatest care in the meantime to preserve the inestimable grace he has received, as the most precious jewel he is possessed of.

There are three means to preserve our vocation, secrecy, prayer, and recollection.

1. In the first place, generally speaking, it is advisable to keep our vocation secret from all except our spiritual director, for seculars commonly make no scruple of telling young people who are called to the religious life, that they are able to serve God in the world equally well; and what is still more wonderful, similar words sometimes escape from the lips of priests, and even of religious; namely, of such religious as have lost the spirit of their vocation. Yes, doubtless, those who have

not been called to religion can serve God in the world, but it is very different with one on whom God has conferred the grace of vocation, but who still remains in the world, to please himself: such an one will, as we have already seen, find it difficult to lead even a regular life, still less a holy one.

We ought especially to conceal our vocation from our parents. It was the opinion of Luther, as Cardinal Bellarmine tells us, that a child committed a sin if he entered religion without the consent of his parents, because, said he, he is bound to obey them in all things; but this opinion is generally rejected by the councils of the Church, and by the doctrine of the holy Fathers. The tenth Council of Toledo, in the last chapter, says expressly, that children may become religious without the consent of their parents, provided they are past the age of puberty. These are the words of the Council: "Parents will not devote their children to religion unless they are under fourteen years of age. After this period it is for children to follow their own wishes in this respect, either with the consent of their parents, or according to their own devotion, independently on the direction of

parents.”* The same rule is prescribed by the Council of Tibur, (Can. 24.) and it is taught by St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, and others, as well as by St. John Chrysostom, who says in his General Thesis, that when parents oppose what regards the spiritual welfare of their children, they must cease to be regarded on that point as parents.† Some say that when a young man who is called to the religious state is able to obtain with ease and certainty the consent of his parents, and has no reason to fear that they will oppose his vocation, it is proper that he should seek to obtain their blessing. This doctrine may be good in theory, but not in practice, where, commonly, indeed almost always, it is attended with danger. It is necessary here to explain this point very clearly, that we may remove certain pharisaical scruples which some persons have on this subject. It is certain that in the choice of a state of life we are not obliged to obey our

Parentibus filios religioni tradere, non amplius quam usque ad decimum quartum eorum ætatis annum, licentia poterit esse. Postea vero, an cum volentate parentum, an suæ devotionis sit solitarium votum, erit filiis licitum religionis assumere cultum.

† Cum spiritualia impediunt parentes nec agnoscendi quidem sunt.

parents, as the Doctors generally teach with St. Thomas, who says, "Slaves are not bound to obey their masters, nor children their parents, in the question of contracting marriage or of entering into religion, or of any other like determination."*

With respect to marriage F. Pinamonti thinks otherwise in his treatise on religious vocation, and adopts the opinion of F. Sanchez, F. Coninchio and others, who hold that a child is bound to take the advice of his parents on this, because it is an affair in which they have more experience than he has, and that in this instance a father usually remembers his duty as a parent. But when the question is concerning a religious vocation, the same F. Pinamonti wisely adds, that a child is not obliged to ask the advice of his parents; for here parents have not had any experience, and their affection for their children blinds them and sometimes changes them into enemies. St. Thomas, speaking of vocation, remarks that our friends according to the flesh often obstruct our progress in

* Non tenentur nec servi dominis, nec filii parentibus obedire de matrimonio contrahendo, vel virginitate servanda, vel aliquo alio hujus modi. II. II. q. 10. a. 5.

spiritual life.* Thus we see that parents rather prefer that their children be damned with them than allow them to save themselves away from them, which made St. Bernard say, "O unkind father! O cruel mother! you find consolation in the death of your children, and desire to see them perish with you, rather than gain the kingdom of heaven far from you."† "God," says a pious author, "when he calls any person to the perfect life, desires that he should forget his father, and makes him understand these words: Hear, O my daughter, and consider, and be attentive; forget thy people and thy father's house."‡ "Whence," he adds, "it is certain that the Lord teaches us in this place that when he calls us we ought not to consult our parents on our vocation." St. Cyril, when explaining these words of Jesus Christ to the young man with whom he was speaking, "That he who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God," comments

* *Frequenter amici carnales adversantur profectui spirituali. II. II. quest. 189. art. 10.*

† *O durum patrem! O œvum matrem! quorum consolatio mors filii est; qui malunt nos perire cum eis, quam regnare sine eis.*

‡ *Audi, filia et vide, et inclina aurem tuam: obliviscere populum tuum et domum patris tui.*

on them thus: "that he who loses time in consulting with his parents respecting his vocation, is one of those whom the Lord has declared unfit for the kingdom of God."* And St. Thomas thence very earnestly cautions all Christians who are called to the religious life to be on their guard how they submit their vocation to the counsel and advice of their relatives. "In this undertaking, begin by separating yourself from your kindred according to the flesh, for it is said, Treat in an important matter with your friend; but, your relations are not, in this affair, your friends, but rather your enemies, according to the words of our Saviour; "The enemies of a man, are those of his own household."†

If then in following our vocation it would be a great error to seek the counsel of our parents, it would be still greater to desire their consent and to ask it of them; for by so doing we run the risk of losing our vocation; for it is more than proba-

* *Aspicit retro qui dilationem quærit cum propinquis conferendo.*

† "Ab hoc consilio primo quidem amovendi sunt carnis propinqui; dicitur enim: causam tuam tracta cum amico tuo. Propinqui enim carnis in hoc negotio amici non sunt, sed inimici, juxta sententiam Domini: Inimici hominis domestici ejus." *Opuse. xvii. c. 10*

ble that our parents will endeavour to oppose it. And, in fact, there have been several saints who, when they were called to leave the world, quitted their father's house without even making their design known to them; thus did St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis Xavier, St. Philip Neri, St. Lewis Beltrando: and we know that the Lord showed by miracles that he approved their glorious flight. St. Peter of Alcantara, in going from the house of his mother, (to whom he had always paid the strictest obedience since the death of his father,) to the monastery in which he was about to become a religious, found his flight impeded by a large river, which he did not know how to cross. He recommended himself to God, and was, in an instant, miraculously transported to the opposite side. So, in a similar case, Stanislaus Kostka, when fleeing from his home, without his father's permission, was closely followed by his brother in a carriage, desirous to overtake him; but, just as he was on the point of doing this the horses stopped suddenly, and by no whipping could be induced to advance; but, after a short interval, they turned round and quickly proceeded back to the town. We have also the example of the

Blessed Oringa of Valdarno in Tuscany, who being promised by her parents in marriage to a young man, fled from him to consecrate herself to God; but finding her way stopped by the river Arno, she prayed for a few moments to God, on which she beheld the waters open, which rising on each side like two crystal walls, afforded her a dry passage.

Thus, my dear brother, if you are called by God to leave the world, be careful that your resolution be not discovered to your parents, but be contented with the blessing of Almighty God, and hasten as much as possible to fulfil your vocation before your friends become acquainted with it, if you would not expose yourself to the imminent danger of losing it; for as I have already said, relations, and above all, fathers and mothers, usually oppose the execution of such vocations; interest and natural affection blinding them, however pious they may be, to such a degree that they scruple not, under any pretexts whatever, to employ all their powers to prevent their children from following the call of God. We read in the Life of F. Paul Segneri the younger, that his mother, although a lady of great piety, left no means in her power

untried to obstruct the vocation of her son, whom God had called to religion. Also in the Life of the Right Rev. Dr. Cavalieri, Bishop of Troyes, we are told that his father, though a very pious man, tried every means to prevent his son from entering into the Congregation of the Pious Labourers, (as he afterwards did,) and even went so far as to enter a process against him in the ecclesiastical court. And how many other parents do we behold, who, from being devout persons of prayer, seem to be quite changed, and behave in such cases as if they were governed and possessed by the devil; for hell never seems to arm itself so strongly as when it is employed in hindering from the accomplishment of his vocation, one whom God has called to the religious state.

Be careful also not to make your vocation known to your companions, for they will not hesitate to advise you against it, or at least to publish your secret, by which means it will easily come to the knowledge of your parents.

2. In the second place, we must not forget that this vocation can only be preserved by prayer; he who neglects prayer, will certainly lose it. We must pray

much and continually; therefore, let him who believes he has a vocation never omit to make each morning at his rising an hour's meditation; or else half an hour in the morning, and another half hour in the evening. This may be done at home if he is able to do it without distraction, or if not, in the church.

Let him be careful to make a visit to the adorable Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin every day, that he may obtain the grace of perseverance in his vocation. Let him not neglect to go to communion once or twice a week. Let his meditations be generally upon the subject of his vocation; considering how great is the grace which God has given him by calling him to the religious state, on the certainty of his eternal salvation, if he is faithful to this voice of God; and on the other hand, to what danger of damnation he exposes himself if he refuses to respond to it. Let him place also before his eyes the hour of death, and consider what consolation he will then experience if he has been obedient to God, and what will be his sorrow and remorse if he should die out of religion in the midst of worldly anxieties and cares. It is desirable that his prayers to Jesus and Mary, and es-

pecially those after communion, and during the visit to the blessed Sacrament, should be directed to the obtaining of perseverance, and in all his prayers and communions let him renew the offering of himself to God, saying, "Behold, O Lord, I am no longer my own, but thine! I have already given myself to thee, I offer myself again to be entirely thine. Accept me, and grant me strength to serve thee faithfully, and let me find shelter as soon as possible in thy house."

3. The third means consists in recollection; and this is not to be obtained without withdrawing from the commerce and amusements of the world. For what trifling cause may occasion the loss of our vocation whilst we remain in the world? A mere nothing, a day of dissipation would suffice, a word from a friend, some passion imperfectly repressed, some attachment, some groundless fear, some slothfulness not resisted; in a word, the merest trifle is enough to destroy all the resolutions we had formed of retiring from the world and of giving ourselves to God. So necessary is it to preserve ourselves in perfect recollection and detachment from all things of this earth. Our whole time should be devoted to prayer and to the

frequent use of the sacraments, and we should spend it either at home or in the church. He who neglects this and allows himself to be distracted by amusements, may be certain that he will unavoidably lose his vocation. He will in all probability frequently feel remorse for not having obeyed the call of God, but he certainly will not follow it. O how many by such omissions have lost their vocation, and with it also their souls!

He who feels himself called by God to enter a religious community where religious discipline is strictly observed, (I say strictly, for it would be better for him to remain in the world than to enter an order where discipline is relaxed,) ought thoroughly to understand that the first rule of every such order is to walk, as nearly as possible, in the footsteps, and follow the example of the most holy life of Jesus Christ; a life entirely detached from the world, mortified and full of sufferings and humiliations; and, therefore, at the same time in which he resolves to enter such an order, he must make up his mind to suffer and to deny himself in everything, according to the words of Christ himself, addressed to those who desired to follow him: "If any man wishes to come after

me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* A man should be strengthened thoroughly in his resolution of suffering, and of suffering severely, that he may not be in danger of yielding to the first temptations which arise, nor sink under the hardships and inconveniences which belong to the poor and mortified life which is led in such communities.

Many on entering religion fail to adopt the right means to find peace and to acquire holiness, because they contemplate only the advantages they expect to derive in it, such as solitude, rest of mind, freedom from family ties, from lawsuits, from subjection to parents, and from all the cares which relate to the wants of life, such as lodging, food, and clothing; and no doubt he who embraces the religious life is freed by it from many distractions and difficulties, finds every facility to serve God in peace, and derives numberless helps towards his spiritual advancement from the good examples of his companions and the counsels of his superiors, who are always watching for his good, in addition to the many pious exercises

* Si quis vult port me venire, abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam et sequatur me. Matt. xvi. 24.

which train him for eternal life; but that he may not lose the benefit of such advantages, he must be firmly resolved to embrace all the sufferings which he will meet with in religion, and whosoever does not lovingly receive these will never obtain that perfect peace which God reserves for those only who for his sake have overcome themselves. "To him that shall overcome," he says, "I will give a hidden manna."* For the peace with which God blesses his faithful servants is interior and hidden, and not understood by men of the world, who, seeing their mortified life, so far from envying, pity them and consider them the most miserable of men.† They see the mortifications which they endure, but perceive not the joy which God bestows upon them. It is certain that the spiritual life is accompanied with suffering, but, says St. Theresa, "When we are resolved to suffer, the pain ceases;" and what is more, the very pains which we endure become real joys. "My daughter," said our Lord one day to St. Bridget, "the house of my treasures is surrounded with thorns, but one who has over-

* *Vincenti dabo manna absconditum.* Rev. ii. 17.

† *Crucem vident, unctionem non vident,* says St. Bernard.

come the first prickles finds nothing but sweets." And the joys which God bestows upon those souls in whom he delights, in prayer, in communion, in holy retirement; the lights, the holy ardour, the intimate union with himself, the peace of conscience, the blessed hope of everlasting life, who can comprehend all these, unless he has received them? One drop only of the consolations of God, says St. Theresa, is worth more than all the comforts and pleasures of the world put together.

Almighty God, even in this valley of tears, bestows on those who suffer for his sake a certain foretaste of the bliss of heaven; and David confirms this when he says, "Thou dost but feign that there is labour in thy precepts."* It seems that when the Lord sends you sufferings and trials he wishes you evil; but it is not so, for on him who gives himself entirely to God, and endures patiently all kinds of suffering for his sake, he bestows that peace which St. Paul says "surpasses all understanding"† and all the pleasures of the world; and therefore we behold a poor religious in his humble cell far more

* Qui fingis laborem in præcepto. Ps. xciii. 20.

† Exuperat omnem sensum. Phil. iv. 7.

tranquil and content than are all the kings of the earth in their palaces. "O taste and see how sweet the Lord is."* I repeat it again, that he who has not experienced this peace is not able to comprehend it.

But you must be well persuaded, that you will never enjoy this true peace, even after you have entered religion, if you are not thoroughly resolved to suffer, and to overcome your own will in all things which are repugnant to it. It is to him who shall have overcome, says the Lord, that I will give the hidden manna.† It is, then, indispensable for him who desires to join a community of strict observance, to enter it with a full resolution of overcoming himself in everything, and of renouncing from his heart every inclination and every desire which does not come from God, or which has not God for its end. He ought therefore to detach himself from all things, and especially from these four. First, from riches and comforts; second, from relations; third, from self-love; fourth, from his own will.

In the first place he must detach

* *Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus. Ps. xxxiii. 9.*

† *Vincenti, dabo manna absconditum.*

himself from riches and comforts. In religion, after the expiration of the time appointed for the noviciate, besides the vows of chastity and obedience, that of poverty is also made; according to which the person can no longer possess a single thing of his own, not even a pin, nor have the free use of it, nor of money, nor of anything else, his wants being provided for by the community. But the vow of poverty is not all that is required to make a religious a worthy follower of Jesus Christ; to this effect it is necessary that he embraces also with all the affections of his heart, the inconveniences which belong to it. "It is not poverty," says St. Bernard, "but the love of poverty which is a virtue;"* by which he means, that being externally poor, will not necessarily make us saints; but we must also love the effects of poverty. Oh! how few desire to be really poor and to resemble their Lord Jesus Christ! Many wish to be poor, says the devout Thomas a Kempis, but they would be poor without wanting anything.† In fact, they desire to have the honours and rewards of poverty, without feeling

* Non paupertas, sed amor paupertatis virtus est.

† Volunt esse pauperes, sed sine defectu.

its inconveniences. It is easily understood that no religious ought to seek for superfluities, such as fine stuff for habits, delicate viands, fine furniture, and such things, and that he should confine his desires to necessary things; but his love of poverty will be better evinced if he remains equally contented and undisturbed when he fails to receive some necessities, such as garments, bed-clothes, or food; for what merit is there in bearing well only that poverty which does not bring with it privation of any serious kind? F. Balthazar Alvarez used to say that to love poverty, it was necessary to love also the effects of poverty, that is to say, (as he explains it) "cold, hunger, thirst, and contempt."* Again, it is not enough that you are contented with what is given to you, and do not seek what, through the negligence of the dispensers, you have failed to receive, (which would be a great fault,) but you must be ready, occasionally, to suffer from the want of those things which the rule allows. You will sometimes have a deficiency of clothes, bed-covering, clean linen, and food; and you must rest quite contented with the little you have receiv-

* *Frigus, famem, sitim et contemptum.*

ed, without making complaint or disturbance, even though they should seem necessary; and he who does not find in himself these dispositions must not think of entering religion; for it is evident he is not called to it; or that he has no desire to embrace its spirit. "He who desires to serve God in his house," says St. Theresa, "must remember that he goes there not to be well treated by God, but to suffer for God."

Secondly, it is required that he who would enter religion be altogether detached from his family, for this is one of those rules of strict observance universally practised, in order to follow more perfectly the teaching of Jesus Christ himself, who says, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword; for I came to separate a man from his father."* And he afterwards gives the reason: "The enemies of a man are those of his own household."† And as I said when treating on the importance of following the religious vocation, when a person resolves to abandon the world, he finds his worst adver-

* Non veni pacem mittere, sed gladium; veni enim separare hominem adversus patrem suum, &c. (Matt. x. 34+)

† Inimici hominis domestici ejus. Matt. x. 36.

saries in his parents, who either from interest or affection, generally allow themselves to become the enemies of God, and endeavour to turn their children away from their vocation, instead of giving their consent. Oh! how many parents shall we see condemned in the valley of Josaphat, for having thus caused their children to lose their vocation! And how many children also shall we see, who, to please their parents and because they did not detach themselves from them, gave up their vocation and lost their own souls. On this subject Jesus Christ says, "He who hateth not his father cannot be my disciple."* Any one, therefore, who wishes to enter into religion, let him resolve to detach himself entirely from his family, and he who has already entered into religion, must remember that he is not less bound to practise this perfect detachment. He ought not to go to the house of his parents, unless in the case of the mortal sickness of his father or mother, or some such urgent necessity, and even then not without the permission of his superior; and it would be regarded as a

* Qui non odit patrem, &c. non potest meus esse discipulus. Luke xiv. 26.

great fault and a scandal for a religious to visit his parents without this express permission. It would be a defect to urge the superior to grant the permission, or even to manifest a desire to see his parents, or to speak to them. St. Charles Borromeo declared, that he never visited his parents without finding his religious fervour chilled. And so when a religious goes to see his parents of his own will, and not through positive obedience to his superiors, he will find himself open to temptations, and coldness as regards the spirit of piety and devotion. St. Vincent of Paul would not revisit his country or his relations more than once, and then it was through absolute necessity. He used to say that the love of country and of home was a great impediment in the spiritual life. He says, "that many persons upon visiting their own country have been so overcome with tenderness for their relations, that they became like flies, which once entangled in the spider's web, are unable to escape. For myself," he adds, "I visited my home but once, and then but for a short time ; and although my object was to remove from my parents all hope of my return to them, yet when the moment arrived for

me to depart, I felt so much grief at leaving them, that I wept during the whole journey, and for three months after I was haunted with the idea of complying with their wishes. At last God in his mercy delivered me from this temptation." A religious must know also, that he cannot write to his parents or friends without the permission of the superior, nor without showing him the letters. To omit this would be a great fault, and one could not be excused, but severely punished; as from hence a thousand disorders might arise to occasion the ruin of the community. The novices, above all, ought to know that in the year of the noviciate this practice is most rigorously attended to, and it is sometimes with difficulty that they obtain permission to speak to, or to write to their parents.

Moreover, should a novice fall sick, it would be a great fault in him to ask, or to manifest a desire, of going home to be cured, for the sake of the greater care he would receive, or that he might breathe his native air. The air of home is almost always injurious and pestilential for the soul of a religious; and if he should say that his desire to go home arises from a wish not to increase the expenses of the

community by the purchase of remedies for the cure of his sickness, he must learn that religion has perfect care and charity for the sick, and with regard to air, the superiors will send him to another house, if the one in which he lives does not seem suitable to his health ; and as to remedies, they would sooner sell their library than allow that the sick should be without them ; so that he need not fear that Divine Providence should neglect him. If it be not the Lord's will that he should recover, he must conform himself to this, and not talk of home ; for it is better for a religious to die at God's good time in his house, attended by his brethren, than in that which was his dwelling in the world, and surrounded by his family.

A religious must divest himself entirely of self-love. Many persons leave their country, their comforts, and their kindred, but they carry with them the worst chain they could retain, that of self-love. The best sacrifice we can make to God is to give up to him, not only our property, our pleasures, our home, but ourselves also. And this is the renouncing of ourselves which is so recommended by Jesus Christ to his followers. The first thing we have to do, in order to deny

ourselves, is to trample under foot all our self-love, and endeavour to receive with joy all the humiliations which may happen to us in religion ; such, for instance, as seeing ourselves placed below those whom we consider our inferiors, or being left without any employment because we are considered useless, or having the meanest or most difficult work given to us to do. As regards this subject, we ought to be convinced that in the house of God, all the services imposed by obedience become, on that account, honourable. God forbid that any one should ask, or manifest a desire, to receive any high office or superior employment: it would be a monstrous thing, and a sign of pride and ambition, and would deserve especial penance and mortification.

It would be better almost to destroy the community at once than to admit that cursed pest, ambition, into it, which would disfigure the holiest body and injure the most beautiful work of God. And further, he must feel an interior consolation when he is derided and despised by his companions ; I say, *an interior consolation*, which is to reside, not in the flesh, but in his rational will. Hence he must not be uneasy at any repugnance he may feel

in his inferior part to his being humbled and despised, provided that the spirit is willing to receive the humiliation and he rejoices in the superior part.

So, likewise, if he should be continually reprehended and mortified by all, not only by superiors, but by his companions and inferiors, he should, from his heart, and with great peace of mind, thank those who tell him of his faults and are so good as to give him advice; the only answer he ought to make is, that he will be more careful not to fall into the same fault again. One of the strongest desires which the Saints had, whilst they were on the earth, was that they might always be despised for the love of Jesus Christ.

It was this which St. John of the Cross exhibited when Jesus appeared to him carrying his cross on his shoulders, saying, "John, ask of me any thing you will;"* and St. John answered, "Lord, I desire to suffer and to be despised for thy sake."† The highest degree of humility, (as holy doctors with St. Francis of Sales teach,) is to rejoice in abjections and humiliations. And herein consists one of the greatest

* Joannes, pete quid vis a me.

† Domine pati, et contemni pro te.

merits we may acquire before God. A single humiliation borne patiently for the love of God, is worth more in his sight than a thousand disciplines or the most severe fasts.

We must remember that we shall have to suffer humiliations and contempt, even in the most holy community, either from superiors or from our companions. To be convinced of this we need only read the Lives of the Saints, which teach us that all good religious, even the most exemplary and fervent, had to endure many severe humiliations and mortifications. Witness St. John, Francis Regis, St. Francis of Jerom, Father Torres, and many others.

The Lord sometimes permits that even amongst the saints there should arise, but without sin, certain contradictions and diversities of opinion, some viewing the same subject in a different light from others; and God allows this, to give occasion for the exercise of patience and humility to his servants.

In short, we shall gain but little in religion from all the sacrifices we make, if we do not bear with patience all sorts of contempt and opposition. And surely one who enters religion in order to give himself entirely to God, would be ashamed

not to be able to bear a little contempt, when he remembers the Lord Jesus Christ, who was "saturated with reproaches,* for the love of us." Let every one then think well of this, and determine on entering religion to rejoice in humiliations, and to be prepared to bear them patiently, for he will most assuredly meet with many: and unless he does this, the uneasiness which such contradiction and contempt will occasion to his mind, will be so distressing when they shall fall upon him, as to induce him to quit religion and lose his vocation altogether. Alas! how many from this want of resignation under humiliation have lost their vocation. But of what benefit to religion and to God is a religious who knows not how to suffer a little humiliation for his love? and how can we call a person dead, according to the promise he made to Jesus Christ in entering religion, that he would die to himself, if he is still living to resentment, and is disquieted, disturbed, and wishful of revenge when he is humbled? Away from the religious life, away with all such lovers of themselves! away as soon as possible, that they may not infect others with their pride. In religion

* *Saturatus obbrobris.*

every one must be dead to self-love above all things ; and if he is not, it is better he should never enter into it, or if he has already entered, let him depart instantly.

4. In embracing the religious state we must renounce our own will, sacrificing it entirely to holy obedience, which is of all things the most necessary. What will it avail us to have abandoned the comforts of the world, parents, and honours, and the like, if we carry the spirit of pride and the attachment of our self-will to the cloister? It is principally in renouncing ourselves, dying a spiritual death, and giving ourselves wholly to Jesus Christ, that the essence of the religious life consists. The gift of our heart, that is, of our will, is that which pleases God best ; it is that which he seeks from his children in religion, and he will value but little our mortifications, our prayers, and all our other sacrifices to him as long as we refuse him that on which he sets the highest value—the renunciation of our own will.

It is certain that by this we obtain the greatest possible merit before God, and that the only certain way of pleasing him in all things is when we can say with Jesus our Saviour, “ I do always the things that

please him.”* And he who, in religion, has not any will of his own, may be certain that in all his actions, such as study, prayer, confession, meals, recreation, repose, and the like, he is pleasing to God, since in this case he makes not a single movement or sigh of his own choice, but in obedience either to the rule or to the commands of superiors.

The world does not understand, and even spiritual persons sometimes cannot comprehend, the value of the life of obedience in a religious community. It is very true that, out of religion, many persons undergo the same pains and perform the same things which are endured and performed by religious. There are also some amongst them who, to a certain degree, live under obedience; yet in most of their actions they follow their own will; they preach, do penance, pray, and fast; but they do all these things, or the greatest part of them, according to their own pleasure. God grant that in the day of judgment they may not have to complain, like those of whom the scripture speaks, “Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded? Why have we hum-

* Ego quæ placita sunt ei, facio semper. John viii. 29.

bled our souls, and thou hast not rewarded us? It is because on the day of your fast you did your own will."* Hear the words of St. Bernard: "Your own will," says he, "is a great evil; it makes the good actions you perform cease to be good."† The reason is, because by following our own will our actions are performed not to please God, but ourselves. But the case is quite different with him who does everything through obedience, for he is sure that in all his actions he pleases God. The venerable mother Mary of Jesus used to say, that for two things the religious life was precious in her eyes; one, because in the monastery she enjoyed continually the company of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar; and the other, because by means of obedience she belonged completely to God, having sacrificed her whole will to him. F. Rodriguez relates, that after the death of Dositheus, the disciple of St. Doritheus, the Lord revealed, that during the five years Dositheus had lived under obedi-

* Quore jejunavimus, et non aspexisti? humiliavimus animas nostras; et nescisti? Ecce in die jejunii vestri invenitur voluntas vestra. Isa. lviii. 3.

† Grande malum propria voluntas, qua fit ut bona tua tibi bona non sint.

ence, though from constant sickness he had been unable to practise the same austerities as the other monks, he had by the virtue of obedience obtained the same reward as St. Paul the hermit and the abbot St. Anthony.

He, therefore, who wishes to enter upon the religious life must resolve to divest himself of all attachment to his own will, and to desire nothing but what holy obedience points out. God preserve all religious from allowing the words, "I will, or I will not," ever to fall from their lips; but in all circumstances, even when his superiors ask him what he desires, the religious should answer, "I desire nothing but what obedience commands me." And provided there is no evident sin in what is commanded, he ought to obey blindly and without examination, for the care of examining on the subject of obedience and of resolving difficulties belongs not to him, but to his superiors; therefore if he does not submit his own judgment to that of his superiors, his obedience will be imperfect. St. Ignatius of Loyola says, that to deliberate and examine in things of obedience does not belong to subjects, but to superiors, and if a subject wishes to be prudent in his obedience, his obedience

is without prudence. St. Bernard says, "Perfect obedience is indiscreet;"* and in another place he says that "it is impossible for a prudent novice to remain long in a religious community."† And he adds the reason: "For the superior is to examine, the subject has only to obey."‡

That we may advance in this most important virtue of obedience, we must be prepared to perform all those things to which we feel the greatest repugnance, and to bear, with resignation, to have all that we desired and sought withheld from us. Thus, for example, when we are most disposed to be in solitude for prayer or study, our superiors may desire us to go abroad, or to do some external labour. In communities, however, the solitary life is adhered to as much as possible; for which purpose many hours are devoted to silence and prayer every day. But nevertheless when the community contains priests who are exercising their functions and employed for the salvation of souls under obedience, they must also be contented with the times for prayer and spiritual

* *Perfecta obedientia est indiscreta.*

† *Novitium prudentem in congregatione durare impossibile est.*

‡ *Discernere superioris est, subditi obedire.*

exercises which are allotted to the rest, and should be satisfied even to forego these, without a murmur or complaint, if obedience so ordains, remembering the saying of St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, "that all things performed through obedience are prayers."

But even when a person has actually entered into religion, having been called by Almighty God; when he has been enabled to overcome his passions and to renounce all earthly attachments, he must not expect to be exempt from other temptations and trials, such as weariness, dryness, darkness, and fears, with which God himself will visit him, in order the more to strengthen his vocation; and we know that even the saints, who were most anxious to accomplish their vocation, were frequently tried by great doubts concerning it, sometimes fearing that they had deceived themselves, and that it would be impossible for them to secure their salvation in the religious state. This happened to St. Theresa, to St. John of the Cross, and to the venerable mother de Chantal; but by recommending themselves to God their darkness was enlightened and they recovered their peace.

It is thus that our Lord proves those

whom he loves most, as he said to Tobias : "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."* And again in Deuteronomy : "The Lord your God trieth you, that it may appear whether you love him or no."†

Every one therefore must be prepared to suffer such spiritual darkness in religion. Sometimes he will feel as if he could not any longer endure the observance of his rule, nor find peace of mind, nor even be saved ; in this case he must arm himself with patience and redouble his watchfulness over himself, lest he should be overcome by the enemy ; and if the temptation should take the form of scruples, or should represent to him some great spiritual good which would follow on his giving up his vocation, let him courageously oppose it as soon as he perceives it, and use the greatest care in order to overcome it.

There are two principal remedies by which he may overcome such temptations. The first is to have recourse to prayer :

* Quia acceptus eras Deo, necesse fuit, ut tentatio probaret te. Tob. xii. 13.

† Tentat vos Dominus Deus vester ut palam fiat, utrum diligatis eum, an non. Deut. xiii. 3.

“Draw near to God, and you shall be enlightened.”* If he addresses himself to God he will not fail to overcome his temptation, but without entreating his aid it will be impossible that he should ever gain the victory. And here observe, that it will not be sufficient to do this once, or even for a few days only, in order to obtain a victory. It may be the Lord’s pleasure that the temptation shall continue, notwithstanding prayer, for weeks or months, or even for years; but be certain that, at length, God will give light and strength to him who perseveres in prayer; he will enable him to overcome the enemy, and he will then experience greater peace than before, and will be more confirmed in his vocation. If a religious has not yet suffered this tempest, let him not be too secure, for all have to endure it; and during such seasons of darkness it is vain to expect fervour or to seek for feelings of peace, for he will find nothing but dryness, trouble, and confusion, and he had better do nothing but turn to God, saying these words: “O Lord, help me, O Lord, help me.” Let him seek the protection of Mary, the mo-

* *Accedite ad eum et illuminamini.* Ps. xxxiii. 6.

ther of perseverance, and rely confidently in the divine promise: "Ask, and you shall receive."* Let him be consoled by thinking that when he shall have overcome the temptation by the aid of divine grace, he will enjoy a far greater calm, comfort, and peace in his vocation than he ever enjoyed before.

The second remedy, no less essentially necessary in this kind of temptation, is to manifest it to the superiors or to the spiritual director of the community; and this should be done at once, and before it has acquired its full strength. St. Philip Neri was used to say that when a temptation is disclosed, it is half conquered. But, on the contrary, there is always very great danger in concealing a temptation from the superior, for in this case God on the one hand, to punish the want of confidence in him, withdraws his light, and the temptation, on the other, gains strength by continuing hidden and concealed, and he may be certain that if the concealment continues he will lose his vocation; for the most dangerous temptations which it is in the devil's power to raise against us are those against vocation,

* *Petite et accipietis.*

and by success in these he gains many victories by one blow; for when a man has lost his vocation and abandoned the religious life, what hope can he entertain of making advances in the way of God? Although the enemy may suggest to him that out of religion he may find more peace and be able to do more good, yet he may be assured that he will no sooner have left the community than he will suffer such remorse as will deprive him of all repose; and God grant that this remorse may not remain to torture him for all eternity in hell, into which a person, (as I have already said,) who has abandoned his vocation through his own fault may so easily fall. He will besides become so lukewarm and have so little spirit of piety, that he will scarcely have power to lift up his eyes to heaven; and he will readily give up prayer, for it will be to him only a source of remorse, and whenever he attempts it he will be interrupted by the reproaches of his conscience crying to him, "What hast thou done? Thou hast abandoned thy God! Thou hast refused to follow thy vocation! And for what? Only to follow thy own will, or the wishes of thy friends." The reproaches of his conscience will remain with him

all his life, and more especially at the hour of his death, as eternity opens to his view, and when, instead of dying in the house of God, and surrounded by his brethren in religion, he will expire at home and amongst the friends to please whom he did not fear to forsake God. Let all religious, then, beseech of God that he will suffer them rather to die than to fall into a misfortune which would be so great a torment to them at the hour of death, when their error could not be retrieved. It would be an excellent subject of meditation, for one who is troubled with temptations against vocation, to reflect upon the great suffering it would occasion him at the hour of death, to remember that he has lost his vocation and is dying out of religion, through his own fault.

Finally, I would advise any one who is desirous of entering religion to resolve to become a saint, and to endure all sorts of sufferings, exterior or interior, rather than prove unfaithful to God or abandon his vocation; and if he cannot determine to do this I exhort him not to deceive the superiors and himself by entering, for it is a sign either that he is not called to it or that he is not willing to respond to his

vocation as he ought to do, which is worse still. In so unprepared a state of mind it would be better for him to wait till he is better able to resolve of giving himself entirely to God and suffering all things for him. If he should, however, determine to make the experiment he will injure both himself and the community, for he will most probably soon leave it, and thus he will disgrace himself in the eyes of the world, and render himself guilty before God of the greatest unfaithfulness to his vocation, and would render himself unable to take a single step in the way of God, who alone knows to what ruin he would expose himself.

But let us now turn our eyes to behold the beautiful spectacle of souls wholly devoted to God in religion, living in this vale of tears, but as if out of it, with no other thought but how they may best please God.

In the religious state a man lives only for life eternal. O happy if we may be enabled to sanctify the few remaining years of our mortal lives by spending them in the service of God! How much more earnestly should those strive after this who have wasted the largest part of their existence in the world! Let us then keep

eternity always in our view, and we shall be willing to suffer all things here with peace and joy. Let us thank God, who has given us light and all means to help us to love him perfectly, and has chosen us before so many others, to serve him in religion, by the gift of his Holy Spirit. Let us increase in all virtues, that we may please him, remembering, as St. Theresa said to her spiritual daughters, that we have, by his grace, already advanced far towards sanctity by having turned our back upon the world and all its goods, so that little remains for us to do in order to become saints. It is certain that Jesus has prepared a high place in heaven for those who happily die in religion. Here we are poor, despised, treated as fools, but our lot will be changed in the next world. Let us recommend ourselves continually to our most loving Redeemer, hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, and to the most holy Mary, since as religious we should profess a more especial love for Jesus Christ in the most Holy Sacrament, and to the immaculate Mary, his virgin Mother, and put our confidence in her. Jesus Christ has chosen us to be the great ones of his court, which we evidently perceive from the special protection that he vouch-

safes to religious houses, and to each brother in the community. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom shall I be afraid?"*

O Lord, accomplish thy own work in us, and make us all thine own for thy glory; and enable all the inmates of thy holy dwellings to please thee till the day of judgment, and to gain many souls to thy service. Amen. Amen.

INSTRUCTION III.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES TO PERSEVERE IN THEIR VOCATION.

THERE are two graces which must be clearly distinguished from each other—the grace of vocation and that of perseverance in vocation. Many persons who have received the former have afterwards rendered themselves unworthy to obtain the latter. "He is not crowned unless he strive lawfully."† None then will receive the grace of perseverance and the crown which God has prepared for it, but

* Dominus illuminatio mea et salus mea, quem timebo.
Ps. xxvi. 1.

Non coronabitur, nisi legitime certaveret. 2 Tim. ii. 5.

those who do their utmost to fight with the enemy and overcome him. "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."* My dear young friend, you, who have been called by the Lord in an especial manner to follow him, hear how he himself exhorts and encourages you: "Be careful, my son," he says to you, "to preserve the grace which you have received from me, and tremble lest you should lose it, and another gain the crown which is prepared for you."

He who enters into the noviciate enters into the service of the King of heaven, who tries the fidelity of those whom he accepts for his own, by crosses and temptations, with which he permits the devil to assault them, as the angel said to Tobias, "Because thou wert acceptable to the Lord, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."† And the Holy Ghost says to all who leave the world to give themselves to God, "My son, when thou comest to the service of God.... prepare thy soul for temptation."‡ So that

* Tene quod habes, ut nemo accipiat coronam tuam. Apoc. iii. 11.

† Et quia acceptus eras Deo, necesse fuit ut tentatio probaret te. Tobias xii. 13.

‡ Fili, accedens ad servitutem Dei.... prepara animam tuam ad tentationem. Eccl. ii. 1.

the novice, on entering the house of God, ought to expect to meet, not with joys and consolations, but with troubles, crosses, and temptations, by which the devil wages war against those who desire to give themselves wholly to God, and strives to withdraw them from the practice of perfection. And be well persuaded that the devil would rather tempt a novice to abandon his vocation (which would be the greatest sign of his damnation) than a thousand seculars, especially if he have entered into an active order; for he knows that if this novice perseveres and is faithful to God, he shall lose thousands of souls who will obtain salvation through his piety, fervour, and zeal, and therefore he neglects no device to beguile him.

The temptations by which the devil most frequently endeavours to induce novices to abandon their vocation are the following. First, he tempts them by the tenderness of their parents. To resist this we must remember that Jesus Christ has declared that "no one is worthy to follow him who loves father or mother more than him."* And he declares that

* Qui amat patrem aut matrem plus quam me non est me dignus. Matt. x. 37.

he came not to send peace, but war. "I came not to send peace, but a sword; for I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother," &c.* And wherefore is this great desire to separate relations from each other? Because our Lord well knew the injury which arises from such intercourse, and that in the affairs of our eternal salvation, especially about religious vocation, we have no greater enemies than our relations; as he says in the words following those I have just cited, "A man's foes shall be those of his own household."† O how many unhappy youths, through affection for their relations, have first lost their vocations, and then, as so easily follows, their own souls. History is full of such fatal instances, and I will relate some of them. F. Jerome Piatti tells us of a novice who was visited by a relation, who said to him, "Listen to me; I only speak because I love you, and I beg you to reflect that your constitution is not fitted to undergo the fatigues and labours of the religious life; by remaining

* Non veni pacem mittere, sed gladium; veni enim separare hominem adversus patrem suum et filiam adversus matrem suam. Matt. x. 34.

† Et inimici hominis domestici ejus.

in the world you may please God better, and bestow on the poor the riches with which he has blessed you. If you persist in your undertaking you will repent it, for after a little time you will be obliged to quit the community in disgrace, or you will be only able to perform the offices of cook or porter, on account of your want of talents and indifferent health; it is therefore wiser to do at once what you will be obliged to do at last." The poor young man, thus urged, left the monastery, and many days had not elapsed before he fell into all kinds of vices; and in a quarrel with some rivals, he, together with the relation who had perverted him, was so severely wounded that they both died on the same day; and what is still worse, the unfortunate novice expired without confession, of which he must have stood in so great need. It is related by Father Casalicchio, that a certain knight, when on the point of entering the house of a woman of bad fame one night, heard the bell of the Capuchin monastery toll for the office, upon which he cried out, "O how can I dare to offend God at the very moment that his servants are going to praise him?" And having been thus called by the Lord he afterwards entered

that order. But his mother did and said everything in her power to make him return to her, and at last succeeded. And what was the consequence? Only a few months afterwards the young man was slain by some enemies, and his dead body carried on a board to his mother. Denis the Carthusian relates, that two novices of his order, having been perverted by their parents, left the convent. Not many days after their departure the father of the two youths, as well as themselves, died of the plague; and, sad to relate, as the author remarks, they made a bad death. F. Mancinelli informs us that a young man of noble birth, though he had entered religion and had resisted with great courage all the arts of his mother, who left nothing untried to divert him from his purpose, at length yielded to her entreaties and continual pursuit, and unhappily left the community. The mother, having accomplished her desire, sought to procure him all sorts of worldly amusements, and made him take lessons in fencing. But, alas! for one day as the youth was engaged in that exercise with a friend, he received a blow on the eye, from the violence of which he died upon the spot, and without confession. The

same F. Casalicchio writes, that when he was giving a mission in a place near Cosenza, called Caroli, he heard of a young man who was withdrawn from the Capuchin monastery; first his father went and demanded with great boldness, so as to cause a great disturbance in the monastery, that his son should be given back to him; afterwards he sent one of his brothers with several armed companions, among whom there was a brother-in-law of the young man, and they effected his removal by force. Attend to the sequel. A month afterwards the father lost his life in a tempest which overtook him in a voyage at sea. At the end of sixty days the brother-in-law died at a distance from his home, and the body of the unhappy novice who had been unfaithful to his vocation was within a short space of time covered with sores, so that from head to foot he became an entire wound, and soon died by a fit of convulsions; and God only knows in what disposition of soul he died.

We read also in the Life of St. Camillus of Lellis, that a young man who had entered his community at Naples was greatly persecuted by his father. The good novice at first withstood him very courageously; but having occasion to go

to Rome he had an interview with his father again, and this time yielded to the temptation. On dismissing him the Saint predicted to him that he would come to an evil end and die by the hand of justice, which was verified, for the young man, who had married, at length, in a fit of jealousy, murdered his wife and two servants; and having been apprehended by justice, notwithstanding that his father expended his whole fortune to save the life of his unhappy son, he was publicly beheaded at Naples, nine years after his departure from the monastery. It is related also, in the Life of the same Saint, that to another novice who desired to return to the world, St. Camillus announced the chastisements of God; he, however, left the convent and went to Messina, where six months afterwards he died suddenly without the sacraments.

Be therefore most watchful on this point, my dear brother, if the devil should seek by this means to make you lose your vocation. The Lord, who by an especial grace has called you to quit the world, desires you not only to leave but also to forget your country and your friends. "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear, and forget thy people

and thy father's house."* Hearken then to what God says to you, and know, that if you desert him for the love of your relations, great will be your sorrow and remorse at the hour of death, when you shall recollect the house of God which you abandoned, and behold around your death-bed only children and relatives, whose grief and tears shall disturb your mind and afflict your heart, instead of affording you any help. You will leave them your riches, but they will not speak to you of God, but rather endeavour to turn your thoughts away from the subject, that they may not increase your fear of death; and perhaps, by flattering you with vain hopes of recovery, they will cause you to expire without any preparation. Contrast with this the joy and peace you will feel in dying in religion, where you will have the happiness of seeing around you your brethren, whose prayers will assist you to fix your hopes in Heaven, and who, instead of deceiving you, will aid you to expire in peace and joy. Reflect also, that though it be true that your parents have loved you for many years with great tenderness, yet God has loved

* Audi filia et vide et inclina aurem tuam; et obliviscere populum tuum et domum patris tui. Ps. xlv. 11.

you long before and with far higher love. You can only enjoy the affection of your parents for thirty or forty years, but God will love you for all eternity. "I have loved you," he says, "with an everlasting love."* Your parents have, it is true, been at some expense for you, and suffered many anxieties on your account; but the Lord Jesus Christ shed all his blood and gave his life for you; and when your tenderness for your parents urges you not to displease them, remember that more gratitude is due to God, who has loved and blessed you so much more than they could. Say to them then, "I leave you, my friends, but it is for God. I leave you, for he merits my love more and loves me better than you;" and by such words as these you will vanquish this terrible temptation of kindred, which has caused the ruin of so many in this world and the next.

Another temptation with which the devil sometimes attacks a novice, is too much anxiety about his bodily health. The deceiver thus insinuates himself into the mind of the novice: "Do you not perceive that by leading such a life you will

* In caritate perpetua dilexi te.

ruin your health, and then you will become useless either in religion or in the world?" The novice must repel this temptation by a firm confidence that if our Lord has given him a vocation he will also give him health to fulfil it. If he has entered into the house of God solely to please him, let him console himself by saying thus: "I concealed nothing concerning the state of my health from my superiors, and they received me and have not yet dismissed me; it is then the will of God that I should remain here, and if it be his will also that I should suffer and even die in his house what does it signify? How many anchorets have gone to suffer for him in forests and caverns! How many martyrs have run with joy to give their lives for him! If then it be his will that I should lose my health or my life for his love, I am content; I desire nothing else, I can desire nothing better." Thus will the fervent religious speak who desires to become a Saint; and if one is not fervent during the noviciate, it is certain that he will never be so at any other time of his life.

A third temptation is the fear of not being able to undergo the inconveniences of the common life, such as scanty

and ill-prepared food, a hard bed, short sleep, prohibition to go out of the house, the observance of silence, and, above all, not being allowed to follow one's own will. When the novice is assailed by this temptation, he should repeat what St. Bernard used to say to himself: "Bernard, why art thou come hither?"* He must remember that he has not come to the house of God to make himself comfortable, but to become a Saint; and how can he become a Saint? Is it by comforts and indulgences? No; but by sufferings, and by dying to his own disorderly affections and appetites. St. Theresa says, that "To expect that God will admit to his love those who are fond of their own ease, is a great mistake;" and in another place, "Souls who truly love God ask not for rest." He therefore who is not firmly resolved to suffer and to bear all things for the love of God, will never make himself a Saint. No; he will never become a Saint, nor ever enjoy true peace. And why? Perhaps you imagine that true peace of mind is to be found in the enjoyment of worldly goods or sensual pleasures. Perhaps you fancy that the high-born and

* Bernarde, ad quid venisti?

the rich, who abound in these things, have arrived at it. They are the most miserable of all men, for they are nourished upon gall and endure the bitterest anguish of soul. "All these things are but vanity and affliction of spirit."* It was thus that Solomon described earthly goods, which he had fully enjoyed. When a man places his affections upon these things, the more he obtains the more he desires to obtain, and is therefore never at rest; but when God is all his happiness in him he finds perfect peace. "Delight in the Lord," says David, "and he will give thee the requests of thy heart."† Father Charles of Lorraine, brother to the Duke of Lorraine, became a religious, and when he found himself alone in his poor cell he felt so great an interior peace that he danced for joy. Blessed Seraphim, a Capuchin, said that he would not give an inch of his cord for all the wealth and dignities of the earth; and St. Theresa would often encourage others under difficulties by saying, "When a soul is resolved to suffer, the pain of suffering ceases."

But here we must take notice of an

* *Vanitas vanitatum, et afflictio spiritus. Eccl. i. 14.*

† *Delectare in Domino, et dabit tibi petitiones cordistui. Psalm xxxiv. 4.*

error by which the devil tempts a novice when he feels this affliction of spirit. "Do you not see," he says to him, "that you have not found peace here? You have lost your devotion, everything is become wearisome, prayer, spiritual reading, communion, even recreation, which shows evidently that God does not wish for you to remain in religion." O what a terrible and dangerous temptation this is for a new and unexperienced novice! In order to overcome it he must first meditate deeply upon the true nature of peace of the soul whilst on earth, which is a place of trial, and therefore must be one of pain. This peace does not consist, as we have already seen, in the enjoyment of the good things of this world, nor in spiritual delights, which of themselves possess no value, nor do they make us more dear to God; but true peace is to be found only in the conformity of our will to that of God, and the peace we ought to desire is that of having our will perfectly united with the Divine will, even in all our desolations and sufferings. O how dear to God is the faithful soul who perseveres in spiritual reading, meditation, communions, and all other pious exercises, solely to please him, without feeling any sensible

consolation! O what great merit holy works obtain when they are performed purely for God's sake, without our enjoying any spiritual sweetness! The Ven. Father Anthony Torres wrote thus to a person who was labouring under spiritual desolation: "When we carry the cross of Jesus without consolations, our soul runs, nay, rather flies, towards perfection." So when the novice feels in this state of aridity he should apply to God, saying, "O Lord, if it is thy will that I should remain in desolation and suffering without comfort, I desire to be in that state as long as it pleases thee. I will never leave thee, but am ready to endure all these troubles during my whole life, and even for all eternity, if thou willest it. For me it is sufficient to know that it is thy will." It is thus that a novice will speak who really desires to love God; but let him know, however, that such sufferings will not last for ever. By such insinuations the devil seeks to destroy his confidence, causing him to believe that his desolation will last for ever, that it will reduce him to despair, and that at length he will be unable to endure it. These terrible storms, however, which the enemy is able to raise in the soul when it is in darkness and

desolation, will not endure for ever. "I will give," says our Lord, "a hidden manna to him who overcometh."* Yes, those who have suffered such tempests of aridity and desolation with patience, and have overcome these temptations, shall be consoled by the Lord himself, who will give them to taste the hidden manna—interior peace—his own blessed peace, which, as St. Paul says, "surpasseth all understanding."† This one thought, I am doing the will of God, I am pleasing God in this state, gives a peace far superior to all the joys, pastimes, feastings, honours, and dignities of the world. God cannot fail in the promise he has made to those who have left all things for his love. "And every one that hath left house or brethren, &c. &c. for my name's sake shall receive an hundred-fold in this life, and shall possess life everlasting."‡ He promises them Paradise in the next world and an hundred-fold in this. And what is this hundred-fold? It is the testimony of a good conscience, which infinitely surpasses all the pleasures of this life.

* *Vincentibus dabo manna absconditum.* Apoc. ii. 17.

† *Pax Dei quæ exuperat omnem sensum.* Phil. iv. 7.

‡ *Qui reliquerit domum vel patrem aut matrem, &c. propter nomen meum centuplum accipiet et vitam eternam possidebit.* Matt. xix. 29.

But I have still to mention the most dangerous of all temptations. Those which I have hitherto described are worldly and carnal, and it is not difficult therefore to recognise them as proceeding from the devil, and by the grace of God they may be unmasked and overcome with some facility; but those which conceal themselves under the appearance of devotion and perfection are more terrible, as being more likely to mislead. The first of these is, to suggest to the novice a doubt about his vocation, saying to him, "Who can say whether yours is a true vocation, or only the effect of your own fancy? If you have not been really called by God, you will not receive the grace of perseverance, and perhaps after you have made the vows you will repent and apostatize; you might have saved your soul in the world, and here it may perhaps be lost." In order to overcome this temptation you must consider how you can know that your vocation is perfectly certain. A vocation is true when these three conditions are united in it: 1st, a good intention; that is to say, the desire of escaping from the dangers of the world, of better insuring eternal salvation, and of becoming more closely united to God; 2ndly, when there

is no positive impediment of health, talent, and necessity of family, and upon all these the novice should be perfectly at rest after he has submitted them to the judgment of his superiors with perfect sincerity and truth; 3rdly, when he is accepted by the superiors. Now, where there is a concurrence of these three things, the novice should not doubt that he has a true vocation.

Another temptation is one which the evil spirit employs with those young persons who, before entering religion, have lived a spiritual life. "Before you came hither," says he, "you prayed more than you do now, and practised more mortifications, more silence and recollection, and gave more alms, &c. Now you are not able to do all these good things, and still less will you be when you have finished your noviciate, for your superiors will then make you apply to your studies, or employ you in some office in the community, or in other things of obedience which will divert you from these pious works." O what a snare is this! If a novice listens to such a temptation it is a sign that he does not understand the great merit of obedience. He who offers all his prayers to God, (and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi

says, that everything which is done in a religious community is prayer,) his alms, fasts, and penances, gives to him a part of the things which belong to him, but not all; or, to speak more plainly, he gives all he possesses, but he does not give himself; whereas he who renounces his own will by a vow of obedience, gives himself entirely to God, and may say to him, "Lord, having consecrated my whole will to thee I have nothing more to give." His own will is the thing of which it is most difficult for a man to divest himself, but it is that gift which is most acceptable to God, and which he requires of us. "My son, give me thy heart,"* that is, thy will; and therefore the Lord declares that obedience is more pleasing to him than all the other sacrifices we can offer him. "Obedience is better than sacrifices."† Thus he who gives himself to God by obedience obtains, not once only, but for ever, a victory over the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, and whatever else may oppose him. "An obedient man shall speak of victory."‡ A man who

* *Præbe fili mi cor tuum mihi.* Prov. xxiii. 26.

† *Melior est obedientia quam victimæ.* 1 Kings, xv. 22.

‡ *Vir obediens loquetur victorias.* Prov. xxi. 28.

lives in the world acquires, no doubt, merit by his fasts, disciplines, prayers, &c., but, performing all of his own choice and according to his own will, he obtains less than a religious, who undertakes nothing but through obedience. The latter gains more merit and is continually acquiring it, because everything in a community is done under obedience; not only when he prays, or fasts, or takes the discipline, but also when he studies, or is employed out of doors, at table, at recreation, and when he goes to rest. St. Aloysius Gonzaga used to say, that in the vessel of religion we are always advancing, even when we are not labouring at the oar. Therefore it is that so many devout persons, after having led a holy life in the world, have been desirous to submit themselves to obedience by entering some religious community, well knowing that however meritorious good works may be when performed according to our own will, they are far more so when done purely through obedience.

Another temptation of a similar kind, but even more dangerous, is when the devil represents to a novice that he can be of more use to his neighbour by living out of religion. "You are come," says

he, "into this community, where there are so many others labouring to assist souls, but you would be able to do far more good by remaining in the world and succouring your own countrymen, who have so great need, and where there are so few spiritual labourers to help them." A man who feels this temptation must remember, that the greatest good which we can possibly do is that which God calls us to do. He has no need of any of us, and if he sees it fit to send more help to your countrymen, he is able to find others to go there; and as he has called you into his house, it is there that you will find the good which he has appointed for you to perform, and it is this: to be perfectly obedient to your rules and to the commands of your superiors. If, through obedience, you should remain inactive in any one place, or be employed in sweeping the house or washing the dishes, it is in these works that you will be doing his will, and in the best way.

Besides, what good can a man do in his own country? Jesus Christ himself when asked to preach and do good in his own country, replied, "No prophet is accepted in his own country."* This is so true,

* *Nemo propheta acceptus est in patria sua.* Luke iv. 24.

that the country-people have a great repugnance to confess great faults to a priest who is their own relative and fellow-countryman, and is constantly amongst them, and they frequently prefer to do this to strangers. As regards sermons, it is often said that those of a fellow-countryman are little valued, because he is one of themselves and they are accustomed to his voice. If a St. Paul came to preach he would be listened to, at first, with great effect, but when he had been heard for six months or a year he would please less and not profit many. Missionaries for this reason do so much good in the countries they visit, because they are strangers, and their voice is new to the people. It is certain that a priest belonging to a community, and, above all, a missionary, will save more souls in a single month and in a single mission, than if he had remained ten years labouring in his native place. Besides, by remaining in the same place, he can only assist those immediately around, whereas if he is engaged in missions he will save hundreds of souls in a thousand different places. Again, a secular is sometimes doubtful and uncertain among different good works, by which he shall best please God ; whilst

a religious, acting always in conformity to the will of his superior, may always feel assured, that whatever he is doing, is conformable to the will of God. Religious are those servants who may say with confidence : We are happy, O Israel ; because the things that are pleasing to God, are made known to us.* The last temptation is one which the devil employs against those whom God has perhaps favoured with some spiritual consolations, such as the gift of tears, and sensible emotions of love. “Do you not perceive,” says he, “that you are not called to an active life in religion, but are intended for the contemplative, for solitude, and for union of the soul with God ? you should choose some other order or a hermitage.” If the devil were to tempt me thus in this manner, I should answer him thus : “As thou dost mention vocation, I ought to follow mine rather than my own inclination, or thy suggestions ; and as God called me to an active order at first, who shall certify to me, that the thought of leaving it, instead of being an inspiration, is not a temptation ?”

* Beati sumus, Israel ; quia quæ deo placent manifesta sunt in nobis. Baruch. iv. 4.

And I would say the same to you, my brother. No doubt God calls some to the active, and some to the contemplative life. But as he has called you to an active order, you should believe that any other thought comes from the devil, who thus endeavours to make you lose your true vocation. St. Philip Neri says, "that we ought not to leave a good state, even for a better, unless we are certain that it is the will of God ; and therefore, if you would avoid error, you should have something more than a moral certainty that God desires you to change it." But what certainty can you have ; especially if your superior and spiritual Father tells you that it is a temptation ? Consider besides, what St. Thomas teaches us, that though the contemplative life in itself is more perfect than the active, yet that the mixed life (that is, one divided between prayer and action) is the most perfect of all ; for it was the life of Jesus Christ himself. And such is the life in all well-ordered active communities, in which many hours are each day devoted to prayer and silence, and these religious may well say, that they lead an active life when abroad, but are like so many hermits at home. Therefore, my dear brother, suffer not

yourself to be led astray by the specious pretexts of the enemy, and be assured, that if you leave the community which has accepted you, you will repent as many have done before you ; but it will be too late to apply a remedy, for he who has once abandoned the religious life will find it very difficult to return to it again.

INSTRUCTION IV.

ON THE MEANS FOR PERSEVERING IN THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

THE first means for persevering in the religious state, is to avoid committing any wilful fault ; for let a novice be assured that the devil tempts him to sin, not so much that he may do evil, as that he may lose his vocation, for by deliberate faults he begins to lose his fervour in prayer, at communion, and all other spiritual exercises. The Lord then withholds his especial graces, according to the rule laid down by St. Paul, "that he who sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly."* And this the more certainly if his defect is pride, for God resists the proud,

* Qui parce seminat, parce et metet. 2 Cor. ix. 6.

and over these the devil acquires great power. So that, whilst the tepidity of the novice increases, the divine light is diminished, and it will not be difficult for the enemy to succeed in making him give up his vocation.

Another means to countermine the devil is to reveal the temptation to the superior. St. Philip Neri said, "that a temptation discovered, is half conquered." As an abscess, if unopened, becomes gangrenous; so a temptation concealed brings on our own ruin : and in fact, experience shows that those who by hiding such temptations in their own bosoms, have allowed themselves to be brought into a strait, (that is, to doubt which way they ought to take, the right or the left,) generally lose their vocation. Therefore it is best to make one great effort, and discover all to the superior ; for God will be so well pleased by this act of humility, and by the violence the novice does to his feelings, that He will instantly enlighten his darkness and dissipate his doubts.

The third means is prayer. Petition God to give you the grace of perseverance, which St. Augustine says, can only be obtained by prayer. But let that novice, who after having received from God the

gift of vocation, is tempted to abandon it, take care when he prays to our Lord, not to say, "Lord, show me what I ought to do, enlighten me," because God has already given him light by calling him to his holy house, and if he only asks for this grace, the devil, who can easily change himself into an angel of light, may deceive him, and make him believe that the thought of leaving religion is an effect of divine light. His prayer should rather be, "O Lord, thou hast given me a vocation, give me also strength to persevere in it." A certain young man was called by God to the religious state, and his vocation being approved by his director, after many trials joined a religious community. His parents did all in their power; and at last succeeded in prevailing upon him to go to another place, that he might more thoroughly examine his vocation; unfortunately, instead of returning to the community, he went home, satisfying by this step his parents, but displeasing God. When I asked him how it happened that he committed such an error, he replied, that he had prayed to God in these words, "Speak, Lord for thy servant heareth."*

Loquere, Domine, quia audit servus tuus. 1 Kings iii. 9.

And afterwards he adopted the resolution of returning to his family. I said to him, "O my son, you were mistaken in your prayer. Your vocation was certain, being confirmed by so many evident signs ; you should not have said *Loquere, Domine*, for God had already spoken, but, *Confirma hoc, Deus, quod operatus es in me* ; 'Give me, O Lord, strength to execute thy will which thou hast made known to me.'* You omitted to do this, and therefore you lost your vocation." Let the misfortune of this young man serve as an admonition to others. Again, let not the novice endeavour to tranquillize his mind by the light of his own reason in such times of temptation, for they are indeed seasons of darkness and confusion; let him simply offer himself anew to God, praying to him thus : "O my God, I give myself to thee, I will never leave thee, help me lest I become unfaithful to thee." By repeating these words whenever the temptation returns, and as I have already said, by making his state known to his superior, he will certainly overcome it. He should recommend himself particularly at such times to Mary, the mother of perseverance.

* Ps. lxvii. 26.

A novice once suffered himself to yield to a temptation of this kind, and was on the point of quitting the monastery, but passing before an image of the Mother of God he stopped and knelt down to repeat an Ave Maria, when he suddenly found himself fixed to the spot and unable to rise; upon which he repented, and made a vow of perseverance. He was immediately free, and rising, went to ask pardon of the master of the novices, and continued firm in his vocation.

Finally; I entreat you, my brother, whenever you are tempted concerning your vocation, to reflect on these two points. First, that the grace of vocation which God has given to you, he has refused to many others, perhaps more deserving than you are. "He hath not done in like manner to every nation."* Therefore you should fear to be so ungrateful as to turn your back upon him, for by so doing you would greatly endanger your eternal salvation. And you would not acquire greater peace even in this world, but you would rather be tormented even to your dying day, with the remembrance of your infidelity.

* Non fecit taliter omni nationi. Ps. civii. 19.

Secondly; if this temptation should present itself to your mind, that if you remain in religion you will fall into despair and repent, and have to render an account to God for it, or any of the other which we have already spoken of; call to your thoughts the hour of your death, and consider whether you will then regret that you followed your vocation, whether you will not be filled with peace and joy, instead of the anguish and remorse which would have followed upon your having abandoned it. Keep this thought always before your mind, and then you will not lose your vocation. Your fidelity will be rewarded with the gift of peace in life and in death, and you will receive hereafter the crown of glory which God has promised to his faithful servants.

AN ACT OF OBLATION AND PRAYER WHICH
THE NOVICE SHOULD MAKE FREQUENTLY,
TO OBTAIN FROM GOD THE GRACE OF
PERSEVERANCE IN HIS VOCATION.

My God, how can I ever render thee sufficient thanks for having called me so lovingly to thy holy family? How have I merited this grace after having committed so many offences against thee? How many

of my companions are left in the world, still in danger of losing their souls, amidst a thousand occasions of sin! whilst I am admitted to thy holy house, and to the company of thy faithful and beloved servants, and to so great abundance of all things necessary for my sanctification! May I one day, O Lord, testify my gratitude to thee in heaven, by singing eternally thy mercies towards me. Meantime I am all thine, and desire to be so for ever. I have already made thee an oblation of my whole being, I renew it to-day, I will remain faithful and will never leave thee, rather will I lay down my life, nay a thousand lives, for thy sake. I here dedicate myself to thy will without any reserve. Do with me whatever thou plearest. Let me live in desolation, in weakness, in contempt, if it be thy good pleasure. It is enough for me to obey and please thee. I desire only the grace to love thee with all my strength, and to remain faithful to thee till death. O holy Mary, my dear Mother, it is you who have obtained from God the precious graces which I have received, and particularly my religious vocation and the strength to follow it; accomplish your work, and obtain for me

perseverance unto death. This is my hope: O may I attain it!

SOME ADVICE TO A NOVICE UPON THE MEANS
BY WHICH HE MAY PRESERVE HIS FER-
VOUR.

1. When reprov'd or accused he must never excuse himself, but let him strive to redouble his charity towards the person who accuses or reproves him.

2. Let him rejoice when he is treated with contempt in all things, in his employment, his dress, his lodging, his food, &c. let him not give his opinion upon any subject, unless it is asked.

3. Let him mortify himself in all things according to prudence and obedience; in eating, in sleeping, and in his senses of seeing, hearing, &c.

4. He must preserve the greatest modesty, when he is alone, as well as in the presence of others. He must never lay his hand upon any person, nor look steadfastly in his face; but keep his eyes constantly cast down, especially in the church, at table, during recreation, and when he walks abroad.

5. Let him observe silence, unless he speaks for the glory of God or for his own

or his neighbour's benefit; and let him be careful (particularly during the time of recreation) not to raise his voice too loud. Let him avoid all debating about his birth, talents, or riches; all discourses about eating, hunting, sports, war, or on the means of acquiring honours, riches, and such secular subjects; let him endeavour to introduce pious conversation upon the vanity of honours, riches, and pleasures of the world, on the love we owe to Jesus and Mary, on the happiness of the Saints, and on the means of advancing in perfection.

6. If he falls into any fault, let him immediately humble himself and make an act of contrition, and then be at peace about it.

7. Let him not desire anything, but that which is the will of God.

8. Let him not seek for consolations; and in aridity, let him say to God, with entire humility and resignation, "O Lord, I do not deserve consolations; I am content to remain in this state all my life."

9. Let him frequently raise his mind to God by means of short ejaculations, such as the following:

My God, I desire nothing but thee.
Show me thy will and I will do it.

Do with me what thou wilt.

I will, O God, whatever thou wilt.

O make me to love thee, and send me where thou wilt.

My Jesus, I love thee, I love thee, I love thee.

O grant that all the world may know thee, and love thee, as thou deservest.

Behold, I leave all things, thou alone sufficest me.

Deus meus et omnia. My God and my all.

Live Jesus, our love, and Mary, our hope.

INSTRUCTION V.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

1. WELL may the words of the Cantic of Moses and of the children of Israel, after their delivery from the tyranny of Pharaoh, and the bondage of Egypt, be applied to religion: "In thy mercy thou hast been a leader to the people which thou hast redeemed, and in thy strength thou hast carried them to thy holy habitation."* As the Hebrews compared with Egyptians were, in the Old Law, the beloved people of God, so religious, contrasted with seculars, form, in the New Law, the choicest part of the flock of Christ. As the Hebrews went forth from

* Exod. xv. 13.

Egypt, a land of labour and of slavery, where God was not known, so religious retire from the world, which gives to its servants no other recompense than pains and bitterness, and in which God is but little known. Finally, as the Hebrews in the desert were guided by a pillar of fire to the land of promise, so religious are conducted by the light of the Holy Ghost into the sanctuary of religion—the bright image of the promised land of heaven. In heaven, there is no self-will; no thirst for earthly riches, or for sensual pleasures; and from the cloister, these pernicious desires, by means of the holy vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity, are effectually excluded. In heaven, to praise God is the constant occupation of the saints, and in religion, every action of the community is referred to the glory of his name. “You praise God,” says St. Augustine, “by the discharge of every duty; you praise him when you eat or drink; you praise him when you rest or sleep.”* Religious praise the Lord by regulating the affairs of the community, by assisting in the sacristy, or at the gate; they praise the

* St. Aug. in Ps. cxlvi.

Lord when they go to table ; they praise him when they retire to rest and sleep ; they praise him in every action of their life. Lastly, in heaven the saints enjoy continual peace ; because there, they find in God the source of every good ; and, in religion, where God alone is sought, in him is found that peace which surpasses all understanding, and that content which the world cannot give. Well, then, might St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi say, that religious should have a high esteem and veneration for their holy state : since, after baptism, a vocation to religion is the greatest grace which God can bestow.

2. You, then, should hold the religious state in higher estimation than all the dignities and kingdoms of the earth. In that holy state you are preserved from sins, which you would commit in the world ; there you are constantly occupied in holy exercises ; there you meet every day with numberless opportunities of meriting an eternal crown. In this life, religion makes your soul the spouse of Jesus Christ, and in the next it will raise it to the rank of queen in the eternal kingdom of his glory. How did you merit to be called to that holy state, in prefer-

ence to so many others who have behaved better than you? Black, indeed, must be your ingratitude, if, for the benefit of your vocation, you do not thank God every day with all the affections of your heart. The advantages of the religious state cannot be better described than in the words of St. Bernard: "Is not that a holy state," says he, "in which a man lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more speedily, walks more cautiously, is bedewed more frequently, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is purged more quickly, and rewarded more abundantly?"* Let us examine these advantages separately, and meditate on the great treasures which each of them contains.

3. 1.—"Vivit purius — A religious lives more purely." Surely all the works of religious are, in themselves, most pure and acceptable before God. Purity of action consists principally in purity of intention, or in a pure motive of pleasing God. Hence, our actions will be agreeable to God in proportion to their conformity to his holy will, and to their freedom from the corruption of self-will. The actions of a secular, however holy and fer-

* St. Ber. de Bono. Rel.

vent he may be, partake more of self-will than those of religious. Seculars pray, communicate, hear mass, read, take the discipline, and recite the divine office when they please. But a religious performs these duties at the time prescribed by obedience—that is, by the holy will of God. For, in his rule, and in the commands of his superior, he hears his voice. Hence, a religious who obeys his rule and his superior merits an eternal reward, not only by his prayers and by the performance of his spiritual duties, but also by his labours, his recreations, and attendance at the door; by his meals, his amusements, and his repose. For, since the performance of all these duties is dictated by obedience, and not by self-will, he does in each the holy will of God, and by each he earns an everlasting crown of glory.

4. Oh! how often does self-will vitiate the most holy actions! Alas! to how many, on the day of judgment, when they shall ask, in the words of Isaias, the reward of their labours—"Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded?—have we humbled our souls, and thou hast not taken notice?"—to how many, I say, will the Almighty Judge answer—

“Behold, in the day of your fast, your own will is found.”* What! he will say, do you demand a reward? Have you not, in doing your own will, already received the recompense of your toils? Have you not, in all your duties, in all your works of penance, sought the indulgence of your own inclinations, rather than the fulfilment of my will? Abbot Gilbert† says that the meanest work of a religious is more meritorious in the sight of God, than the most heroic action of a secular. St. Bernard asserts,‡ that if a person in the world did the fourth part of what is ordinarily done by religious, he would be venerated as a saint. And has not experience shown, that the virtues of many, whose sanctity shone resplendent in the world, faded away before the bright examples of the fervent souls, whom, on entering religion, they found in the cloister? A religious, then, because in all his actions he does the will of God, can truly say that he belongs entirely to him. The venerable mother Mary of Jesus, foundress of the Convent of Tolosa, used to say, that for two reasons she enter-

* Isa. lviii. 3

† Serm. 87.

‡ Serm. 4, in. Ps. Qui habitat.

tained a high esteem for her vocation ; first, because a religious enjoys the society of Jesus Christ, who, in the holy sacrament, dwells with her in the same habitation ; secondly, because a religious, having by the vow of obedience sacrificed her own will and her whole being to God, she belongs unreservedly to him.

5. 2. — “*Cadit rarius* — A religious falls more rarely.” Religious are certainly less exposed to the danger of sin than seculars. Almighty God represented the world to St. Anthony, and before him to St. John the evangelist, as a place full of snares. Hence, the holy Apostle said, that in the world there is nothing but the “concupiscence of the flesh,” or of carnal pleasures ; “the concupiscence of the eyes,” or of earthly riches ; “and the pride of life,” or worldly honours, which swell the heart with arrogance and pride. In religion, by means of the holy vows, these poisoned sources of sin are cut off. By the vow of chastity, all the pleasures of sense are for ever abandoned ; by the vow of poverty, the desire of riches is perfectly eradicated ; and, by the vow of obedience, the ambition of empty honours is utterly extinguished.

6. It is, indeed, possible for a Christian

to live in the world without any attachment to its goods ; but it is difficult to dwell in the midst of pestilence and to escape contagion. "The whole world," says St. John, "is seated in wickedness."* St. Ambrose in his comment on this passage says, that they who remain in the world live under the miserable and cruel despotism of sin. The atmosphere of the world is noxious and pestilential: whosoever breathes it easily catches spiritual infection. Human respect, bad example, and evil conversations, are powerful incitements to earthly attachments, and to estrangement of the soul from God.—Every one knows that the damnation of numberless souls is attributable to the occasions of sin so common in the world. From these occasions religious who live in the retirement of the cloister are far removed. Hence St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was accustomed to embrace the walls of her convent, saying, "O blessed walls ! O blessed walls ! from how many dangers do you preserve me !" Hence, also, blessed Mary Magdalen Orsini, whenever she saw a religious laugh, used to say, "Laugh and rejoice, dear sister, for you have reason to be hap-

* John, 1 Ep. v. 19.

py, being far away from the dangers of the world."

7. 3.—"*Surgit velocius*—A religious rises more speedily." If a religious should be so unfortunate as to fall into sin, he has the most efficacious helps to rise again. His rule, which obliges him to frequent the holy sacrament of penance; his meditations, in which he is reminded of the eternal truths; the good examples of his saintly companions, and the reproofs of his superiors, are powerful helps to rise from his fallen state. "Wo," says the Holy Ghost, "to him that is alone; for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up."* If a secular forsake the path of virtue, he seldom finds a friend to admonish and correct him, and is therefore exposed to great danger of persevering and dying in his sins. But in religion, "if one fall he shall be supported by the other."†—If a religious commit a fault, his companions assist him to correct and repair it. "He," says St. Thomas, "is assisted by his companions to rise again."

8. 4.—"*Incedit cautius*—A religious walks more cautiously." Religious enjoy far greater spiritual advantages than the

* Eccl. iv. 10.

† Eccl. iv. 10.

first princes or monarchs of the earth. Kings, indeed, abound in riches, honours, and pleasures, but no one will dare to correct their faults, or to point out their duties. All abstain from alluding to their defects, through fear of incurring their displeasure; and to secure their esteem many even go so far as to applaud their vices. But if a religious go astray, his error will be instantly corrected; his superiors and companions in religion will not fail to admonish him, and to point out his danger; and even the good example of his brothers will remind him continually of the transgression into which he has fallen. Surely a Christian, who believes that eternal life is the one thing necessary, should set a higher value upon these helps to salvation than upon all the dignities and kingdoms of the earth.

9. As the world presents to seculars innumerable obstacles to virtue, so the cloister holds out to religious continual preventives of sin. In religion the great care which is taken to prevent light faults is a strong bulwark against the commission of grievous transgressions. If a religious resist temptations to venial sin, he merits by that resistance additional strength to conquer temptations to mortal

sin ; but if through frailty he sometimes yields to them, all is not lost—the evil is easily repaired. Even then the enemy does not get possession of his soul ; at most he only succeeds in taking some unimportant outpost, from which he may be easily driven ; while, by such defeats, the religious is taught the necessity of greater vigilance and of stronger defences against future attacks. He is convinced of his own weakness, and being humbled and rendered diffident of his own strength, he recurs more frequently and with more confidence to Jesus Christ and his holy Mother. Thus from these falls the religious sustains no serious injury ; since, as soon as he is humbled before the Lord, God stretches forth his all-powerful arm to raise him up. “ When he shall fall, he shall not be bruised, for the Lord putteth his hand under him.”*—On the contrary, such victories over his weakness contribute to inspire greater diffidence in himself, and greater confidence in God. Blessed Egidius, of the order of St. Francis, used to say, that one degree of grace in religion is better than ten in the world ; because in religion it is easy to profit of grace, and hard to lose it ; while in the world, grace fruc-

* Ps. xxxvi. 24.

tifies with difficulty, and is lost with facility.

10. 5.—“*Irroratur frequentius* — A religious is bedewed more frequently.” O God, with what internal illuminations, spiritual delights, and sweetness of love does Jesus refresh the good religious at prayer, communion, in presence of the holy sacrament, and in the cell before the crucifix! Christians in the world are like plants in a barren land, on which but little of the dew of heaven falls, and from that little the soil for want of proper cultivation seldom derives fertility. Poor seculars! they desire to devote more time to prayer, to receive the holy Eucharist, and to hear the word of God more frequently; they long for greater solitude, for more recollection, and a more intimate union of their souls with God. But temporal affairs, human ties, visits of friends, and restraints of the world, place these means of sanctification almost beyond their reach. But religious are like trees planted in a fruitful soil, which is continually and abundantly watered with the dews of heaven. In the cloister the Lord continually comforts and animates his faithful servants by infusing interior lights and consolations during the time of medi-

tation, sermons, and spiritual reading, and even by means of the good example of their companions. Well, then, might mother Catherine of Jesus, of the holy order of St. Theresa, say, when reminded of the labours she had endured in the foundation of a convent, "God has rewarded me abundantly by permitting me to spend one hour in religion in the house of his holy mother."

11. 6.—"Quiescit securius—A religious rests more securely." Worldly goods can never satisfy the cravings of the human soul. The brute creation, being destined only for this world, are content with the goods of the earth; but being made for God, man can never enjoy happiness except in the possession of the divinity. The experience of ages proves this truth; for if the goods of this life could content the heart of man, kings and princes who abound in riches, honours, and earthly pleasures, should spend their days in the enjoyment of perfect bliss and happiness. But history and experience attest, that they are the most unhappy and discontented of men, and that riches and dignities are always the fertile sources of fears, of troubles, and of bitterness. The Emperor Theodosius entered one day,

unknown, into the cell of a solitary monk; and after some conversation, said, "Father, do you know who I am? I am the Emperor Theodosius." He then added, "Oh! how happy are you, who lead here on earth a life of contentment, free from the cares and woes of the world. I am a sovereign of the earth, but be assured, father, that I never dine in peace."

12. But how can the world, a place of treachery, of jealousies, of fears, and commotions, give peace to man? In the world, indeed, there are certain wretched pleasures which perplex rather than content the soul; which delight the senses for a moment, but leave lasting anguish and remorse behind. Hence the more exalted and honourable the rank and station a man holds in the world, the greater is his uneasiness, and the more racking his discontent; for earthly dignities, in proportion to their elevation, are accompanied with cares and contradictions. We may, then, conclude that the world, in which the heart-rending passions of ambition, avarice, and the love of pleasures, exercise a cruel tyranny over the human heart, must be a place not of ease and happiness, but of inquietude and torture. Its goods can never be possessed to the full extent

of our wishes ; and when enjoyed, instead of infusing content and peace into the soul, they drench her with the bitterness of gall. Hence, whosoever is satiated with earthly goods, is saturated with wormwood and poison.

13. Happy, then, the religious who loves God, and knows how to estimate the favour which he bestowed upon him in calling him from the world and placing him in religion ; where conquering by holy mortification his rebellious passions, and practising continued self-denial, he enjoys that peace, which, according to the Apostle, exceeds all the delights of sensual gratification, "The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding."* Find me, if you can, among those seculars on whom fortune has lavished her choicest gifts, or even among the first princes or kings of the earth, a soul more happy or content than a religious divested of every worldly affection, and intent only on pleasing God. He is not rendered unhappy by poverty, for he preferred it before all the riches of the earth ; he has voluntarily chosen it, and rejoices in its privations ; nor by the mortification of the senses, for he entered religion to

* Phil. iv. 7.

die to the world and to himself; nor by the restraints of obedience, for he knows that the renunciation of self-will is the most acceptable sacrifice he could offer to God. He is not afflicted at his humiliations, because it was to be despised that he came into the house of God. "I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than dwell in the tabernacles of sinners." * The retirement is to him rather a source of consolation than of sorrow; because it frees him from the cares and dangers of the world. To serve the community, to be treated with contempt, or to be afflicted with infirmities, does not trouble the tranquillity of his soul, because he knows that all these make him more dear to Jesus Christ. Finally, the observance of his rule does not interrupt the joys of a religious, because the labours and burdens which it imposes, however numerous and heavy they may be, are but the wings of a dove, which are necessary to fly to and be united with his God. Oh! how happy and delightful is the state of a religious, whose heart is not divided, and who can say with St. Francis, "My God and my all!"

14. It is true that, even in the cloister,

* Ps. lxxxiii. 11.

there are some discontented souls ; for even in religion there are some who do not live as religious ought to live. To be a good religious, and to be content, are one and the same thing ; for the happiness of a religious consists in a constant and perfect union of his will with the adorable will of God. Whosoever is not united to him cannot be happy ; for God cannot infuse his consolations into a soul that resists his holy will. I have been accustomed to say, that a religious in the cloister enjoys a foretaste of Paradise, or suffers an anticipation of hell. To endure the pains of hell, is to be separated from God ; to be forced against the inclinations of nature, to do the will of others ; to be distrusted, despised, reprov'd, and chastised, by those with whom we live ; in a word, it is to be in continual torture without a moment's peace. Such is the miserable condition of a bad religious ; and therefore he suffers on earth an anticipation of the torments of hell. The happiness of Paradise consists in an exemption from the cares and afflictions of the world ; in the conversation with the saints ; in a perfect union and the enjoyment of continual peace with God. A perfect religious possesses all these blessings, and

therefore receives in this life a fortaste of Paradise.

15. Fervent religious have, indeed, their crosses to carry here below ; for this life is a state of merit, and consequently of suffering. The inconveniences of living in community are burdensome ; the reproofs of superiors, and the refusals of permission, galling ; the mortification of the senses painful ; and the contradiction and contempt of companions, intolerable to self-love. But to a religious who desires to belong entirely to God, all these occasions of suffering are so many sources of consolation and delight ; for he knows that by embracing pain, he offers a sweet odour to God. St. Bonaventure says that the love of God is like honey, which sweetens every bitter. The venerable Cæsar de Bustis addressed a nephew who had entered religion in the following words : “ My dear nephew, when you look at the heavens, think on Paradise ; when you see the world, reflect on hell, where the damned endure eternal torments without a moment’s enjoyment ; when you behold your monastery remember purgatory, where many just souls suffer in peace and with a certainty of eternal life.” And what more delightful than to suffer (if suffering

it can be called) with a tranquil conscience, than to suffer for Jesus, and with an assurance that every pain will one day become a gem in an everlasting crown? Ah! the brightest jewels in the diadems of the saints, are the sufferings which they endured in this life with patience and resignation.

16. Our God is faithful to his promises, and bountiful beyond measure. He knows how to remunerate his servants, even in this life, by interior sweetness, for the pains which they patiently suffer for his sake. Experience shows that religious who seek consolation and happiness from creatures, are always discontented, while they who practise the greatest mortifications enjoy continual peace. Let us, then, be persuaded, that neither pleasures of sense, nor honours, nor riches, nor the world with all its goods, can make us happy. God alone can content the heart of man. Whoever finds him, possesses all things. Hence St. Scholastica said, that if men knew the peace which religious enjoy in retirement, the entire world would become one great convent; and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi used to say, that they would abandon the delights of the world, and force their way into reli-

gion. Hence, also, St. Laurence Justinian says, that "God has designedly concealed the happiness of the religious state; because if it were known, all would relinquish the world and fly to religion."

17. The very solitude, silence, and tranquillity of the cloister, give to a soul that loves God a foretaste of Paradise. Father Charles of Lorena, a Jesuit of royal extraction, used to say that the peace which he enjoyed during a single moment in his cell, was an abundant remuneration for the sacrifice he had made in quitting the world. Such was the happiness which he occasionally experienced in his cell, that he would sometimes exult and dance with joy. Arnolf, a Cistercian, comparing the riches and honours of the court which he had left, with the consolations which he found in religion, exclaimed, "How faithfully fulfilled, O Jesus, is the promise which thou hast made of rendering a hundred-fold to him who leaves all things for thy sake!" St. Bernard's monks, who led lives of great penance and austerities, received in their solitude such spiritual delights, that they were afraid they should obtain in this life the reward of their labours. Let it be your care to unite yourself close-

ly with God; to embrace with peace all the crosses he sends you; to love what is most perfect; and, when necessary, to do violence to yourself. And that you may be able to accomplish all this, pray continually; pray in your meditations, in your communions, in your visits to the blessed Sacrament, and especially when you are tempted by the devil; and you shall obtain a place in the number of those fervent souls, who are more happy and content than all the princes and kings and emperors of the earth.

18. Beg of God to give you the spirit of a perfect religious; that spirit which impels the soul to act, not according to the dictates of nature, but according to the motions of grace, or from the sole motive of pleasing God. Why wear the habit of a religious, if in heart and soul you be a secular, and live according to the maxims of the world? Whosoever profanes the garb of religion, by a worldly spirit and a worldly life, has an apostate heart. "To maintain," says St. Bernard, "a secular spirit under the habit of religion, is apostacy of heart."* The spirit of a religious, then, implies an exact obedience to the rules, and to the

* Ser. 5, Ps. xc.

directions of the superior, along with a great zeal for the interests of religion. Some religious wish to become saints, but only according to their own caprice; that is, by long silence, prayer, and spiritual reading, without being employed in any of the offices of the community. Hence if they are sent to the door, or to other distracting occupations, they become impatient, they complain, and sometimes obstinately refuse to obey, saying that such offices are to them occasions of sin. Oh! such is not the spirit of a religious; surely what is conformable to the will of God cannot hurt the soul. The spirit of a religious requires a total detachment from the world; great love and affection for prayer, for silence, and for recollection; ardent zeal for exact observance; deep abhorrence of sensual indulgence; intense charity towards all men; and, finally, a love of God capable of subduing and of ruling all the passions. Such is the spirit of a perfect religious. Whosoever does not possess this spirit, should, at least, desire it ardently, should do violence to himself, and earnestly beg God's assistance to obtain it. In a word, the spirit of a religious supposes a total disengagement of the heart from every thing

which is not God, and a perfect consecration of the soul to him, and to him alone.

19. 7. — “*Moritur confidentius* — A religious dies more confidently.” Some are deterred from entering religion by the apprehension that their abandonment of the world might be afterwards to them a source of regret. But in making choice of a state of life, I would advise such persons to reflect not on the pleasure of this life, but on the hour of death; which will determine their happiness or misery for all eternity. And I would ask, if, in the world, surrounded by seculars, disturbed by the fondness of children, from whom they are about to be separated for ever, perplexed with the care of their worldly affairs, and troubled by a thousand scruples of conscience, they can expect to die more contented than in the house of God, assisted by their holy companions, who continually speak of God, who pray for them, and console and encourage them in their passage to eternity? Imagine you see, on the one hand, a prince dying in a splendid palace, attended by a retinue of servants, surrounded by his wife, his children, and relations, and represent to yourself, on the other, a religious expiring in his monas-

tery, in a poor cell, mortified, humble, far from his relatives, stripped of property and self-will ; and tell me, which of the two dies most contented ? Ah ! the enjoyment of riches, of honours, and pleasures in this life, does not afford consolation at the hour of death, but rather begets grief and diffidence of salvation ; while poverty, humiliations, penitential austerities, and detachment from the world, render death sweet, and give to a Christian increased hopes of attaining that true felicity which shall never terminate.

20. Jesus Christ has promised that whosoever leaves his house and relatives for God's sake, shall enjoy eternal life. "And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or lands, for my sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and possess life everlasting." * A certain religious of the Society of Jesus, being observed to smile on his death-bed, some of his brethren who were present began to apprehend that he was not aware of his danger, and asked him why he smiled ; he answered, "Why should I not smile, since I am sure of Paradise ? Has not the Lord himself

* Matt. xix. 29.

promised to give eternal life to those who leave the world for his sake? I have long since abandoned all things for the love of him: he cannot violate his own promises. I smile, then, because I confidently expect eternal glory." The same sentiment was expressed long before by St. John Chrysostom, writing to a certain religious: "God," says the saint, "cannot tell a lie; but he has promised eternal life to those who leave the goods of this world. You have left all these things; why, then, should you doubt the fulfilment of his promise?"*

21. St. Bernard says that "it is very easy to pass from the cell to heaven; because a person who dies in the cell, scarcely ever descends into hell, since it seldom happens that a religious perseveres in his cell till death, unless he be predestined to eternal happiness."† Hence St. Laurence Justinian says that religion is the gate of Paradise; because living in religion, and partaking of its advantages, is a great mark of election to glory.‡ No wonder, then, that Gerard, the brother of St. Bernard, when dying in his monastery, began to sing with joy

* S. Chrysos., lib. de Prov.

† S. Bern., trac. de vita solit. ‡ Cap. 7, de discip. mon.

and gladness. God himself says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."* And surely religious, who by the holy vows, and especially by the vow of obedience, or total renunciation of self-will, die to the world and to themselves, must be ranked amongst the number of those who "die in the Lord." Hence, Father Suarez, remembering at the hour of death, that all his actions in religion were performed through obedience, was filled with spiritual joy, and exclaimed that he could not imagine death could be so sweet and so full of consolation.

22. 8.—"Purgatur citius—A religious is purged more quickly." St. Thomas teaches, that the perfect consecration which a religious makes of himself to God, by his solemn profession, remits the guilt and punishment of all his past sins. "But," he says,† "it may be reasonably said, that a person, by entering into religion, obtains the remission of all sins. For, to make satisfaction for all sins, it is sufficient to dedicate one self entirely to the service of God by entering religion, which dedication exceeds all manner of satisfaction." "Hence," he

* Ap. xiv. 13.

† 2. 2 q. ult. a. 3, ad. 3.

concludes, "we read in the Lives of the Fathers, that they who enter into religion, obtain the same grace as those who receive baptism." The defects committed, after profession, by a good religious, are expiated in this world by his daily exercises of piety, by his meditations, communions, and mortifications. But, if a religious should not make full atonement in this life for all his sins, his purgatory will not be of long duration. The many sacrifices which are offered for him after death, and the prayers of the community, will soon release him from suffering.

23. 9.— "*Remuneratur copiosius* — A religious is more abundantly rewarded." Worldlings are blind to the things of God; they do not comprehend the happiness of eternal glory, in comparison of which the pleasures of this world are but wretchedness and misery. If they had just notions, and a lively sense of the glory of Paradise, they would assuredly abandon their possessions—even kings would abdicate their crowns—and, quitting the world, in which it is exceedingly difficult to attend to the one thing necessary, they would retire into the cloister to secure their eternal salvation.

Bless, then, O religious soul, and continually thank your God, who by his own lights and graces has delivered you from the bondage of Egypt and brought you to his own house ; prove your gratitude by fidelity in his service, and by a faithful correspondence with so great a grace. Compare all the goods of this world with the eternal felicity which God has prepared for those who leave all things for his sake, and you will find, that there is a greater disparity between the transitory joys of this life and the eternal beatitude of the saints, than there is between a grain of sand and the entire creation.

24. Jesus Christ has promised, that whosoever shall leave all things for his sake, shall receive a hundred-fold in this life, and eternal glory in the next. Can you doubt his words ? Can you imagine that he will not be faithful to his promise ? Is he not more liberal in rewarding virtue than in punishing vice ? If they who give a cup of cold water in his name, shall not be left without abundant remuneration,* how great and incomprehensible must be the reward which a religious, who aspires to perfection, shall receive for the numberless works of piety

* St. Mark, ix, 40.

which he performs every day!—for so many meditations, offices, and communions!—for so many acts of mortification and of divine love which he daily refers to God's honour and glory! Do you not know that these good works which are performed through obedience, and in compliance with the religious vows, merit a far greater reward than the good works of seculars? Brother Lacci, of the Society of Jesus, appeared after death to a certain person, and said that he and King Philip the Second were crowned with bliss, but that his own glory as far surpassed that of Philip, as the exalted dignity of an earthly sovereign is raised above the low station of an humble religious.

25. The dignity of martyrdom is sublime; but the religious state appears to possess something still more excellent. The martyr suffers that he may not lose his soul: the religious suffers to render himself more acceptable to God. A martyr dies for the faith: a religious for perfection. Although the religious state has lost much of its primitive splendour, we may still say, with truth, that the souls who are most dear to God, who have attained the greatest perfection, and who

edify the Church by the odour of their sanctity, are, for the most part, to be found in religion. How few are there in the world, even amongst the most fervent, who rise at midnight to pray and sing the praises of God! How few who spend five or six hours each day in these or similar works of piety! Who practise fasting, abstinence, and mortification! How few who observe silence, or accustom themselves to do the will of others rather than their own! And, surely, all these are performed by the religious of every order: even in convents where the discipline is relaxed, many are found, who aspire to perfection, observe the rules, and perform, in private, many works of supererogation. It is evident that the conduct of the generality of pious Christians in the world cannot be compared with that of good religious. No wonder, then, that St. Cyprian called virgins, consecrated to God, the flower of the garden of the Church, and the noblest portion of the flock of Jesus Christ.* St. Gregory Nazianzen says, the religious “are the first fruits of the flock of the Lord, the pillars and crown of faith, and

* Lib. de. hab. Virg.

the pearls of the Church.”* I hold, as certain, that the greater number of the seraphic thrones, which were left vacant by the fall of the unhappy associates of Lucifer, will be filled by religious. Out of the sixty, who, during the last century, were enrolled in the catalogue of saints, or honoured with the appellation of *blessed*, all, with the exception of five or six, belonged to the religious orders. Jesus Christ once said to St. Theresa: “Wo to the world, but for religious.”† Ruffinus says, “It cannot be doubted, that the world is preserved from ruin by the merits of religious.”‡ When, then, the devil affrights you by representing the difficulty of observing your rule, and practising self-denial and the austerities necessary for salvation, raise your eyes to heaven, and the hope of eternal beatitude will give you strength and courage to suffer all things. The trials, mortifications, and all miseries of this life, will soon be past, and to them will succeed the ineffable delights of Paradise, which shall be enjoyed for eternity without fear of failure or of diminution.

* Orat. ult in Jul.

† Riber. Lib. 1, vit. c. 12.

‡ Ruffin. Prol. in vita Patr.

ABSTRACT OF THE VIRTUES WHICH THE RELIGIOUS THAT WISHES TO BECOME A SAINT SHOULD PRACTISE.

It would be useful for religious to read this abstract on the day of their retreat, in order to see in what virtue they fail.

1. To desire always to advance in the love of Jesus Christ. Holy desires are the wings with which souls fly to God. Hence it is necessary to meditate frequently on the passion of our Lord. To make frequent acts of the love of Jesus Christ during the day, beginning as soon as you awake in the morning, and ending on the evening before you fall asleep. And always to ask of Jesus Christ his holy love.

2. To go to communion as often as possible with the permission of your director. And during the day to make several spiritual communions, at least three.

3. To visit the most holy sacrament at least once in the day ; and in the visit, to ask perseverance and holy love, after the acts of faith, thanksgiving, and love. And when you meet with troubles, losses, affronts, or any other cross, have recourse to the most holy sacrament, from the

place in which you find yourself at the time.

4. Every morning, at rising, to offer yourself to suffer with patience all the crosses which shall befall you during the day, and when they happen, always to say, Lord, your will be always done.

5. To rejoice in the infinite happiness of God. He that loves God more than himself, ought to rejoice in his felicity more than in his own.

6. To desire Paradise, and therefore to desire death in order to be delivered from the danger of losing God, and to go to love him for eternity, and with all your strength.

7. To desire and to labour that all may love Jesus Christ; and therefore, to speak frequently to your companions of the love of Jesus Christ.

8. To treat with God without reserve, not refusing him anything which you know to be pleasing to him; and ever to choose what is most pleasing to him.

9. To pray, every day, for the souls in purgatory, and for poor sinners.

10. To perform all your actions through the sole motive of giving pleasure to Jesus Christ, saying at the beginning of each action: Lord, may this be entirely for you.

11. To offer yourself several times in the day, to suffer every pain for his sake, saying: My Jesus, I give myself entirely to you: here I am, do with me whatsoever you please.

12. To resolve to die rather than commit a deliberate venial sin.

13. To abstain from even lawful gratifications, at least two or three times in the day.

14. To spend two hours, or at least an hour, every day in mental prayer.

15. To love solitude and silence, in order to converse alone with God, hence it is necessary to love the church and the cell, and to shun the grate and the parlour as much as possible.

16. To perform all the exterior mortifications, which you are allowed by obedience, but to attend particularly to interior mortifications; such as not to indulge curiosity, to be silent when you receive an affront, and never to do anything through self-satisfaction.

17. To perform every spiritual exercise as if it were the last time you should perform it; and on that account to think frequently on death in your meditations. And when you are in bed, consider that there you shall one day breathe your last.

18. Not to abandon your usual devotions, or any other good work, through human respect, aridity, or tediousness.

19. Not to complain, in sickness, of the inattention of the physicians, or of the infirmarian; and to endeavour to conceal your pains, except when it is necessary to mention them to the physician or to the superior.

20. To banish melancholy, preserving tranquillity and a uniform serenity of countenance in all events. He who wishes what God wishes should never be afflicted.

21. In temptations to have recourse instantly and with confidence to Jesus and Mary, and to continue constantly to repeat the names of Jesus and Mary as long as the temptation lasts.

22. To place all your confidence, first, in the passion of Christ, and then in the intercession of Mary, and to ask every day this confidence from God.

23. After a fault never to give way to disturbance of mind, or to diffidence, even though you should relapse several times into the same fault; but instantly to repent of it, and trusting in God to renew your resolution to correct it.

24. To render good to all who treat

you badly, at least by praying to God for them.

25. To answer with meekness all who offend you by acts or words, and thus gain them to God.

26. When you are disturbed you will do well to remain silent until the mind is composed, otherwise you will commit a thousand faults without perceiving them.

27. In correcting others, endeavour to select a time when neither you, nor the person to be corrected, are disturbed ; otherwise the correction will do more harm than good.

28. Always to speak well of others, and to excuse the intention when you cannot excuse the action.

29. To assist others to the best of your ability, and particularly those who are opposed to you.

30. Neither to say nor to do anything disagreeable to others unless when it is more pleasing to God that you should say or do it. And when you sometimes fail in charity to your neighbour, to ask pardon, or at least to speak to the person with kindness ; and always to speak with meekness, and in a low tone.

31. To offer to God the affronts which you receive, and not to complain of them to others.

32. To observe punctually the rules of the order. St. Francis of Sales used to say, that the most austere penance of a religious is to sacrifice his own self-will, and to be content that the observance of rule be the priest that every moment offers such a sacrifice to God. He would frequently say, that the predestination of religious is annexed to the love of their rules. And to superiors he used to say, that to fulfil their office, they should do nothing else than observe the rule, and make it be observed by others.

33. To regard every superior as the person of Jesus Christ, and therefore to obey them punctually and without reply.

34. To love the most lowly offices. To select the poorest things. To humble yourself under all, even your inferiors. Not to speak of yourself either well or ill; for speaking ill of yourself may sometimes foment pride. Not to excuse yourself when reprov'd, nor even when you are calumniated, unless it is absolutely necessary in order to obey your superiors or to prevent scandal to others.

35. To visit the sick, and to assist them according to the best of your ability, particularly those who are most abandoned.

36. To say frequently to yourself, I

have come to the house of God, not to indulge in pleasure, but to suffer ; not to lead a life of comfort, but of poverty ; not to be honoured, but to be despised ; not to do my own will, but the will of others.

37. To renew always the purpose to become a saint, and not to lose courage in any state of tepidity in which you may find yourself.

38. To renew, every day, the vows of your profession.

39. To conform to the divine will in all things opposed to the senses, in sorrows, infirmities, affronts, contradictions, losses of property, death of relations or other persons who are dear to you. And to direct all your actions, communions, and other prayers to that end, always asking of God to make you love him, and fulfil his holy will in all things.

40. To recommend yourself to the prayers of other devout persons ; but recommend yourself more to the Saints in heaven, and particularly to most holy Mary, setting a great value on the devotion to this divine mother, and endeavouring to infuse it into others.

CONSIDERATIONS

FOR THOSE WHO ARE CALLED TO

THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

CONSIDERATION I.

THAT ETERNAL SALVATION IS ASSURED TO
SOULS IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

To understand the great importance of the eternal salvation of our souls, we need only to have faith and to consider that we have but one soul, and if we lose this we lose all. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul?"* This great maxim of the gospel has sent so many Christians, some to cloisters, some to the desert, and others to give their lives for Jesus Christ in martyrdom. Each one has said to himself: What avails the possession of the whole world and all the goods it presents

* Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patriatur. *Matt. xvi. 26.*

to us during this short life, if we lose our souls and render ourselves miserable for eternity? What remains to the rich ones of the earth, to all those princes and emperors who are now in hell, of all that they enjoyed on earth, but greater torments and despair? O! how do these unfortunate souls now weep, and cry out to us, "All those things are passed away like a shadow."* All has indeed passed away from them like a shadow, like a dream, and the torment which remains has already lasted many years, and will endure for ever.

"The figure of this world passeth away."† This world is the scene which lasts a very short time; happy they who know how to perform their parts in this scene so as to deserve the recompense of eternal happiness hereafter.

It will matter but little, then, whether in this world a person was poor, despised and afflicted, if hereafter he is happy, and honoured by God and by all his saints for all eternity. It is for this end alone that the Lord has placed us in the world, and that we live upon the earth. The object for which we were drawn out

* *Transierunt omnia illa tamquam umbra.* *Wisd. v. 9.*
† *Praeterit figura hujus mundi.* *1 Cor. vii. 31.*

of nothing and enriched with so many gifts of nature and grace, was not that we might heap up and enjoy the perishable goods of this world, but that we might labour to gather up treasures of immortal glory.*

Such is the object which all men who live in this vale of tears ought to have always in view; but the evil is that in the world men think very little indeed, if ever, about eternal life. In the midst of the darkness of this mystical Egypt the greater number of men labour only to obtain the honours and enjoyments of the world, and it is for the sake of these so many lose their souls. "The earth is overwhelmed with desolation, because there is no one who thinketh in his heart."† How few there are who reflect that death will one day come and put an end to this short scene! that an eternity attends them hereafter! How few there are who consider what God has done for the love of us! and thus it is that these unfortunate creatures live in a most wretched state of spiritual blindness, separated from God, after the manner of the brute beasts,

* *Finem vero vitam æternam.* Rom. vi. 22.

† *Desolatione desolata est omnis terra, quia nullus est qui recogitet corde.* Jerem. xii. 11.

which have no understanding, with their affections and thoughts constantly turned towards the earth, without ever having recourse to God, or feeling any desire of his love, utterly forgetful of eternity. At last they die miserably, but their departure from this life is but the beginning of eternal death and everlasting misery. Then it is they open their eyes, but it is only to pour forth in despair bitter and unavailing tears over their past folly. Happy the religious who, separated from the world and placed in the sanctuary of religion, has every opportunity of meditating continually on the truths of eternity. "Remember thy last end," says the Holy Spirit, "and thou shalt never sin."* In all well-regulated religious houses this is practised, not merely once, but many times a day, so that well can we say, that the bright light which is thus perpetually diffused from the meditation of heavenly things, makes it morally impossible for the members of the said communities to live, at least for any length of time, separated from God, or without setting in order the affairs of eternity.

* *Memorare novissima tua et in æternum non peccabis.*
Eccl. vii. 40.

CONSIDERATION II.

ON THE HAPPY DEATH OF RELIGIOUS.

“BLESSED are the dead who die in the Lord.”* And who may with greater truth be said to be of the number of those happy souls who die in the Lord, than religious, who at the end of their lives are already found to be dead to the world and all its pleasures by means of their holy vows?

O think, dear brother, how happy you will be, if, having followed your vocation, you have the happiness of dying in the house of God! The devil will not fail to represent to you, that if you retire into a monastery, perhaps you will afterwards repent of having left your home and your country, and deprived your family of the advantages which they might have derived from your being with them. But say to yourself: At the hour of death shall I be sorry, or shall I not rather rejoice at having followed my resolution? Therefore, I beseech you, place yourself now in the situation of one dying and about to appear at the tribunal of Jesus

* *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur. Apoc. xiv. 13.*

Christ, and consider what you will wish most to have done when you shall have arrived at this state. Will you desire then to have pleased your parents, to have advanced the temporal prosperity of your family, to have served your country, and to die surrounded by your relatives and friends, after having lived in your own house, honoured with the functions of vicar, canon, bishop, or minister of state, and having followed your own will? Will you not rather wish to die in the house of God, assisted by your brethren in religion, and encouraged by them to go forward to meet your heavenly Spouse, after having led for many years a humble and mortified life, stripped of all goods, away from your relations, deprived of your own will, subject to obedience, detached, in fine, from every earthly thing, and placed in that state which renders death sweet and precious before the Lord? He who is accustomed, says St. Bernard, to deprive himself of the world, will scarcely perceive that he quits the world when his hour for dying shall come.* Pope Honorius II., when about to die, expressed his regret that he

* Qui consuevit se delectationibus mundi privare mundum deserere non sentiet.

had not remained in his monastery to wash the dishes, rather than to have become pope. Philip II. wished when dying that he had been a lay-brother in some religious community, occupied in serving God, rather than a king. Philip III. also, king of Spain, said at his death, "O that I had been a simple servant of God in some desert, and not a monarch, for then I should appear with greater confidence before the tribunal of Jesus Christ." When the devil tempts you therefore to abandon your vocation, call to mind the period of your death, and imagine yourself to be near that awful moment on which eternity depends.* Thus you will overcome all temptations, and remain faithful to God. Be sure that you will not repent having done so at the hour of your death, but will render unceasing thanks to God for it, and at last die full of hope and content. Gerard, the brother of St. Bernard, when dying, began to sing, so happy was he to think that he died in the house of God. Father Suarez, of the Society of Jesus, experienced such great sweetness and consolation at dying in religion, that he exclaimed, "I did not think it was so sweet

* *Momentuma quo pendet æternitas.*

a thing to die ! * Another holy religious of the same Society, when about to die, began to laugh ; on being asked why he laughed, he replied, " Why should I not laugh ? Has not Jesus Christ himself promised Paradise to those who abandon all things for the love of him ? Was it not he who said, ' Whosoever shall leave his house, his brethren, his father, &c., shall receive a hundred-fold and possess everlasting life ? ' † Behold I have left all for God ; God is faithful, he cannot fail in his promise ; therefore," he added, " why should I not rejoice and laugh at seeing myself certain of Paradise ? " A lay-brother who died some years ago, said to those who inquired of him what he wished for more, " I desire nothing but to die, that I may be united to God." Father Sarnelli, a little before death, spoke to God in these words : " O Lord, thou knowest that all my actions and all my thoughts have been for thy glory ; and now I sigh after the moment when I shall see thee face to face, if that is thy will ; and now I resign myself to a sweet agony." He then began some pious col-

* Non putabam tam dulce esse mori.

† Qui reliquerit domum suam vel fratres aut patrem, &c., centuplum accipiet et vitam æternam possidebit? Matt. xix. 29.

loquies with God, and a little afterwards peacefully expired with a smile upon his lips. A sweet odour immediately arose from his body, which, as many persons attested, remained for many days in the room where he died. St. Bernard, then, had good reason when speaking of the happiness of the religious state, to cry out, "O secure life, where man expects death without fear, desires it with joy, and receives it with devotion!"*

CONSIDERATION III.

ON THE ACCOUNT WHICH HE WILL HAVE TO GIVE TO JESUS CHRIST AT THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, WHO HAS NOT OBEYED HIS VOCATION.

THE grace of vocation to the religious state is by no means common; it is, on the contrary, very rare, and is given by God but to a few of his elect.† O how much greater a grace is it to be called to a life of perfection, to be the familiar friend of God, and to dwell in his holy

* O, vita secure, ubi absque formidine mors expectatur; immo et exoptatur cum dulcedine et excipitur cum devotione!

† Non fecit taliter omni nationi. Ps. cxlvii. 20.

house, than it is to be called to reign over the greatest kingdom of the earth ! And what comparison is there between any temporal kingdom upon earth, and the eternal kingdom in heaven ?

But the greater is the grace which God has given, the greater will be his wrath against him who has not corresponded to it, and the more rigorous also will his judgment be when he shall stand before the tribunal of Christ. If a king invited a simple shepherd to his palace to serve him as one of the nobles of his court, how great would be his indignation if that shepherd refused to come, preferring to retain his wretched sheepfold and his miserable flock ! God knows well the value of the graces which he bestows, and consequently he will chastise with proportionate severity those who despise them. He alone is master, and when he speaks to a soul, when by his light he calls her to a life of perfection, if that soul does not correspond immediately, God will retire and leave her in darkness. O how many poor souls shall we see condemned at the day of judgment for this only cause, that they were called by God, but did not obey him ! Thank our Lord, then, for having called you to walk in his own footsteps ; but

tremble, if you do not correspond to his invitation. Since God calls you to serve him nearer to his sacred person, it is a sign that he desires your salvation; he desires however that you save yourself by that way alone which he has marked out and chosen for you: if you pretend to save your soul by the way you choose yourself, you run great risk of perishing; since, if you remain in the world when God has called you to religion, he will not afford you all those efficacious aids which he has prepared for you in his holy dwelling, and without which you cannot work out your salvation. "My sheep hear my voice," * said he. He therefore who does not obey the voice of God, shows that he is not, and never will be, one of his flock; but he will be condemned with the goats in the valley of Josaphat.

CONSIDERATION IV.

ON THE TORMENT OF A SOUL WHICH SHALL
BE CONDEMNED TO HELL FOR HAVING LOST
HER VOCATION.

THE remorse for having lost, by our
own fault, some great good, or of having

* John. x. 27.

being the voluntary cause of some great evil to ourselves, is so painful that even in this life it is an insupportable torment. Consider, then, what that youth will have to endure who was called by God to the religious state by a singular favour, when he discovers that if he had obeyed his vocation he would have obtained a happy place in Paradise, but that instead, through his neglect of it, he finds himself plunged into an abyss of torments without hope of remedy, for those pains will last for ever. Then he will exclaim, "O fool that I was! I might have become a saint, and if I had obeyed the voice of God I should have been one now; but I am condemned, and without remedy!" The miserable being will then open his eyes, but only to increase his torment. And in the day of general judgment he will behold those faithful souls standing on the right hand of Christ and crowned with the saints, who, following their vocation, left the world entirely and sought refuge in the house of God, to which he also had been called; but now he is separated from the company of the blessed, and banished with an innumerable crowd of souls who are damned in punishment of their disobedience to

the calls of God. Ah! then indeed the thought of the grace of vocation which he received and which he despised will be a deeper hell for him.

Now, we already know, and have considered in another place, how he exposes himself to this dreadful loss, who in order to follow his own fancies turns his back upon the divine voice which calls him to the religious state. My dear brother, you have been called to sanctify your soul in the house of God; see then to what extreme danger you expose yourself, if by your own fault you lose this blessed vocation. And this same vocation, by which God in his infinite goodness has designed to draw you from the crowd and place you amidst the chosen princes of Paradise, will become another hell for you if you are unfaithful to it, and you will have none but yourself to blame. Choose, then, since God this day has given you the choice; choose whether you will be a great king in Paradise, or condemned to fiercer torments than others in hell.

CONSIDERATION V.

ON THE VERY GREAT GLORY RELIGIOUS WILL
ENJOY IN HEAVEN.

CONSIDER what St. Bernard has said, that it is hardly possible for a religious who dies in his community to be damned. "From the cell to heaven the way is very easy; one can scarcely go down from thence into hell."* And the Saint subjoins the reason: "Because it is very difficult for a religious to persevere until death if he is not of the number of the elect."† For this reason St. Laurence Justinian said, that "the religious life is the gate of Paradise."‡ And the same Saint adds, that religious have in their state of life an assured sign, as it were, of their predestination.§

Consider again, that Paradise is, as the apostle says, a crown of justice, that in this manner God rewards our good works far beyond their merit, and he measures the recompense of each in proportion to

* *Facilis via de cellâ ad cœlum. Vix unquam aliquis à cellâ infernum descendit.*

† *Quia vix unquam nisi prædestinatus in eâ, usque ad mortem persistit.*

‡ *Illius cœlestis civitatis iste est introitus.*

§ *Magnum quippe electionis indicium.*

the good works he has done.* Judge, then, by this of the greatness of the recompense which God reserves in heaven for good religious, on account of the great merits they acquire every day. The religious sacrifices to God all his earthly goods, and is content to live in poverty without possessing the least thing; he renounces every attachment to his family, his friends, his country, in order that he may be more perfectly united to God; he mortifies himself continually in the privation of all those things which he would have enjoyed in the world. In fine, the religious makes a perfect oblation of himself to God, in sacrificing his own will by the vow of obedience. The thing, doubtless, which beyond others is most dear to us, is our own will, and it is this which God requires of us before all. "My son," says he, "give me thy heart;"† by the heart is here signified the will. He who serves God in the world may indeed give him the goods he possesses, but he does not give himself; he gives a part only, not all; for though he gives his goods by alms, his food by fasts, his blood by disciplines, nevertheless he reserves to

* *Reddet unicuique secundum opera sua.* Matt. xvi. 27.

† *Præbe, fili mi, cor tuum mihi.* Prov. xxvi. 29.

himself his own will, fasting and praying, &c. according to his inclination ; whereas, the religious, making an offering to God of his own will, thereby gives his entire being to God, and in the most perfect manner delivers up not only the fruit of the tree, but even the tree itself ; and then it is that he is able to say in truth, " Lord, after having given thee my will, there remains nothing more that I can give thee."

Thus in all that a religious does through obedience he may be certain of performing the will of God, and every action will become meritorious ; not only when he prays, hears confessions, or preaches, when he fasts, or practises other acts of mortification, but also when he takes his meals, when he sweeps his cell, when he makes his bed, or when he goes to rest, and even when he takes his recreation ; since in doing everything under obedience he consequently does in everything the will of God. St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi said that every act of obedience was a prayer. St. Anselm also has said, that whatever a religious does, (speaking of those who do nothing but what obedience directs,) is meritorious.

St. Louis Gonzaga used to say, that in religion we travel in a boat with sails,

which does not cease to advance even though we do not row. O how much more a religious will gain towards his salvation by the observance of his rule for a single month, than a secular with all his penances and prayers will gain in a year! This has been already shown in the instance of that disciple of St. Dorotheus named Dositheus, to whom, for the five years that he passed in obedience to his superior, there was awarded in heaven a degree of glory equal to that of Paul the hermit and St. Anthony abbot, each of whom passed many years in the desert.

Certainly religious have much to suffer during this life from the constraint of discipline; "they walk and go onwards weeping,"* says the Psalmist. But when they shall be called to the other world they will go straight to heaven. "They shall return with transports of joy, bearing the sheaves of their harvest."† Then also shall they sing, "The strong bands which bound me to the Lord have become of infinite value to me, and the glory they have obtained for me is immense."‡

* Euntes ibant et flebant.

† Venientes autem venient cum exultatione portantes manipulos suos. Ps. cxxv. 6.

‡ Funes ceciderunt mihi in præclaris; etenim hæreditas mea præclara est mihi. Ps. xv. 6.

CONSIDERATION VI.

ON THE PEACE WHICH GOD GIVES TO GOOD
RELIGIOUS.

THE promises of God cannot become void. God has said, "Whoever has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess eternal life;"* that is to say, a hundred-fold even in this world, and life everlasting in Paradise. The peace of the soul is far preferable to all the kingdoms of the earth, and what doth it avail us to possess the whole world without this interior peace? It is a hundred times better to be but a poor peasant and the poorest in the land, and be content, than to be the master of the world and live in inquietude. But who is able to give us this peace? Shall we find it in the world? This peace is a gift which we cannot obtain but from God. "O Lord," says the Church in her prayers, "grant to thy servants that peace which the world cannot give." Therefore she seeks all con-

* Matt. xix. 29.

solation from God. Now if God is the sole giver of this peace, on whom, think you, will he bestow it, if not on those who have left all things and detached themselves from all creatures, that they may belong entirely to their Creator? Thus it is we see good religious live more contented shut up in their cells, poor, mortified, and despised, than the great ones of the world with all the riches, pomps, and pleasures which surround them. St. Sebastian declared, that if mankind could know the peace which good religious enjoy, the entire world would become a convent. And St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi said, that if this was well understood, men would scale the convent walls on every side in order to become religious. The human heart being created for an infinite good, the possession of all created things would not be able to satisfy it, because they are but limited and finite goods. God alone, who is an infinite good, is able to satisfy all its desires. "Place thy delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the desires of thy heart."* No; a good religious, united to God, will not envy the princes of the world, who possess power,

* Psalm xxxvi. 4.

riches, and honours; "Let them keep their riches," he will say, with St. Paulinus, "let the kings of the earth possess their kingdoms; as for me, Jesus Christ is my kingdom, and all my glory." He will see the people of the world foolishly glorying in their pomp and their pride, but he is continually striving to detach himself from terrestrial things, and to be more closely united to God, will live contented and say, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will call upon the name of the Lord." St. Theresa declared that a single particle of this heavenly consolation surpassed all the delights of the world. Father Charles Lorrain, (of the family of the princes of Lorrain,) having become a religious, assures us that God, by a glimpse which he gave him of the joys of the religious life, more than paid him for all that he had left in the world. Sometimes, indeed, these delights were so great, that being alone in his cell he could not refrain from dancing. Blessed Seraphim d'Ascoli, a Capuchin monk, said that he would not give two fingers' breadth of his cord for all the kingdoms of the earth. O what happiness does he enjoy who, having abandoned everything for God, can say with St.

Francis, "My God and my all!"* and beholds himself disengaged from the slavery of the world and from every suggestion and affection of earth. Such is the liberty which is enjoyed by the children of God, as good religious are called. It is true, that in the beginning this separation from the commerce and pastimes of the world, the practices of the community and of his rules may appear thorns; "but these thorns," as our Lord said to St. Bridget, "become flowers and joys of Paradise after a time to those who bear the first wounds they inflict with courage and love." He will enjoy even upon this earth that peace which (as St. Paul says) surpasses all the delights of sense, all the joys of feasts, of society, and all the pleasures of the world.† And what peace can be more perfect than to know that one is pleasing God?

CONSIDERATION VII.

ON THE EVIL OF TEPIDITY IN RELIGIOUS.

CONSIDER the miserable state of that religious, who, after having abandoned his

* Deus meus et omnia!

† Pax Dei quæ exuperat omnem sensum. Phil. iv. 7.

country, his parents, and the world with all its pleasures, after giving himself to Jesus Christ by the sacrifice of his will, his liberty, and his entire being, exposes himself to the danger of eternal perdition by leading a life of lukewarmness and negligence.

The religious who remains tepid after God has called him to his holy house that he may become holy, is not very far from losing his soul. God himself has threatened that He will vomit such as these out of his mouth, and abandon them if they do not amend.* St. Ignatius of Loyola, seeing a certain lay-brother of his community manifest some negligence in the service of God, called him one day and said to him, "Brother, tell me, what did you come hither to do?" The brother answered, "I came to serve God." "O my brother," replied the Saint, "what are you saying! if you had told me you came to serve a cardinal or a prince of the earth, you would be more excusable, but you say you are come to serve God; and is it thus you serve him?" F. Nieremberg says that certain persons are called by God to save themselves by becoming

* Sed quia tepidus es, incipiam te evomere. Ap. iii. 16.

saints, and that if they do not exert all their powers to sanctify themselves, but expect salvation while they remain in their imperfections, they only deceive themselves, for they shall not be saved." Thus St. Augustine also declares that those who are indifferent are commonly abandoned by God.* And in what does this abandonment consist? It is in this, God permits that from the light faults of which they have been warned in vain, they should pass on to greater, until at length they lose the divine grace and their vocation. St. Theresa saw the place which had been prepared for her in hell if she had not renounced a certain worldly affection, which however was but slightly culpable.† "He who neglects little things shall fall in the end."

Many persons wish indeed to follow Jesus Christ, but they would follow him "afar off," like St. Peter when the Jews seized his master in the garden of Olives, as St. Matthew relates:‡ but in so doing they will fall as St. Peter did at last, who on the first trying occasion, denied Jesus

* Deus negligentes deserere consuevit.

† Qui spernit modica paulatim decidet. Ecol. xix. 1.

‡ Sequebatur eum a longe. xxix. 58.

Christ. If the tepid religious is satisfied with the little he does for God, God however will not be contented with it, for He called him to the perfect life, and in punishment of his ingratitude, not only will He withdraw from him those special favours He has blessed him with, but He will permit his utter ruin. "As soon as thou hast said, 'It is enough,' thou art lost," says St. Austin.* The fig tree of the gospel was destroyed only because it did not bear fruit.

Father Louis de Ponte, has said, "I have committed many faults, but I have never made peace with sin." Wo to that religious, who being called to perfection, makes peace with sin. As long as a soul detests its imperfections, there is hope of its becoming holy; but if one commits sins and neglects them, St. Bernard assures us that all hopes of sanctity are lost. "He who sows little, shall reap but little."† Ordinary graces are not enough to make a saint, it requires extraordinary ones; but how shall God lavish his favours on one who takes but little trouble, and that seldom, to acquire his love?

* Ubi dixisti sufficit, ibi periisti.

† Qui parce seminat, parce et metet. 2 Cor. ix. 6.

However, in order to become holy, we must arm ourselves with courage and energy to overcome all the contradictions we may meet with: "And let not any one imagine," says St. Bernard, "that he will be able to arrive at perfection unless he distinguishes himself above others in the practice of virtue." * Reflect then, my brother, why have you left the world and all its goods? For no other end, truly, than that you may become holy. But tell me, is this lukewarm and sinful life which you lead the way which conducts to holiness? St. Theresa, in order to encourage the zeal of her spiritual daughters, used to say to them, "My sisters, you have done the greatest part, but little remains to do that you may become saints." I will say the same to you; the greatest part you have perhaps performed; you have left your country, your home, your parents, your goods and pleasures: there is but little more to do: O do it then!

* *Perfectum non potest esse nisi singulare.*

CONSIDERATION VIII.

HOW DEAR A SOUL IS TO GOD WHICH GIVES
ITSELF ENTIRELY TO HIM.

ONE is my dove, my perfect one, is but one.* God loves all those that love him,† Many persons whilst they give themselves to God, preserve in their hearts some affection for creatures which prevents their being entirely devoted to his love. But how can we expect God to give himself entirely to one who divides his heart between him and creatures? It is just that he be reserved towards one who shows himself so sparing in his love for him. But on the contrary, he gives himself entirely to those souls, who having emptied their hearts of all which is not God, or which does not conduce to his love, have given themselves perfectly to him, and are able to say with truth, "My God and my all." St. Theresa, as long as she continued to cherish an inordinate though not sinful affection for one person, could not hear from Jesus Christ those words which he addressed to her when she was freed from

* Cant. vi. 8.

† Ego diligentes me diligo. Prov. viii. 17.

all attachment and devoted entirely to divine love: "Behold, thou art all mine, and I also am all thine." Consider that the Son of God has not hesitated to give himself entirely to you: "Unto us a child is born and a son is given."* He has given himself to us for the love which he had for us. "He has loved us and has delivered himself for us."† From this St. John Chrysostom concludes, "If a God has given himself entirely to thee without reserve,‡ it is but just that in thy turn thou shouldst give thyself generously and entirely to him, and that thou shouldst address him henceforth with all the ardour of divine love in the words of that hymn,

'What raptures sweet from Christ's caresses flow;
Jesus on me doth all his heart bestow,
And I to Jesus will my heart return;
So may both hearts with mutual ardours burn.'

St. Theresa revealed to one of her nuns, to whom she appeared after death, that God loves better one soul which is united to him as his spouse, and belongs entirely to him, than a thousand which are luke-

* Puer natus est nobis; filius datus est nobis. Isa. ix. 6.

† Dilexit nos et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis. Eph. v. 2.

‡ Totum tibi dedit, nihil sibi reliquit.

warm and imperfect. Generous souls thus devoted entirely to God, desire to equal the seraphim in the ardour of their love, and to worship him as these glorious spirits do. Our Lord himself has said, that so great is his love for a soul which constantly tends to perfection, that he seems to love but this one alone amidst all the rest.* This caused the blessed Eloy in one of his exhortations to say, "One alone to one alone." *Una uni.* My single soul to its only lover. By which he would have us understand, that our one soul ought to belong perfectly and without division to that only one who deserves all our love, on whom all our happiness depends, and who has loved us more than all created beings. "*Dimitte omnia, et invenies omnia,*" says the devout à Kempis, "if thou leavest all for God, thou shalt find all in God." St. Bernard cries out, "*O anima, sola esto, ut soli te servet*—Preserve thyself entire, without dividing thy affections amongst creatures, that thou mayest belong solely to him who deserves an infinite love, and to whom alone thy love is due."

* *Una est columba mea, perfecta mea.*

CONSIDERATION IX.

THAT, IN ORDER TO BECOME HOLY, IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE AN ARDENT DESIRE OF HOLINESS.

No one has ever become a Saint but by means of having a great desire of acquiring sanctity. For as wings are necessary to enable birds to fly, so our souls must have holy desires if we would advance towards perfection. That we may become Saints, we must detach ourselves from creatures, subdue our passions, overcome ourselves, and love the cross ; but to do all this we need great strength, for there we shall have much to suffer. But what does this holy desire effect? St. Laurence Justinian answers, "It gives us strength, and it sweetens pain."* And the same saint adds, that he has already almost conquered who ardently desires to conquer.† No one who desires to reach the top of the mountain will ever attain it, unless he has an earnest wish to get there. But this desire will give him courage and strength to support the fatigue of the

* *Vires subministrat pœnam exhibet leviozem.*

† *Magna victoria pars est vincendi desiderium.*

ascent, but without it he will remain lying at the foot wearied and hopeless.

St. Bernard assures us that the progress which we make towards perfection is always in proportion to the desire we have of obtaining it. And St. Theresa says that God loves those generous souls who have ardent desires; and therefore she exhorts all thus: "Let our thoughts be high, for thence arises our good. We must never suffer our desires to grow weak, but place great confidence in God, who will give us strength from time to time, that we may be able to attain to that point, at which, by the succour of his grace, the saints have already arrived. It was by this means that some of the saints reached in a short time a high degree of perfection, and did such great things for God.* It was thus that St. Aloysius Gonzaga, in a few years, (for he did not live more than twenty-three years,) arrived at so great a degree of sanctity, that St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, beholding him in spirit in Paradise, said that she did not see any saint in heaven who enjoyed a greater

* Consummatus in brevis, explevit tempora multa.
Wisd. iv. 18.

degree of glory than Aloysius. And she understood at the same time that he had acquired so great sanctity by the ardent desire which he had to love God as much as he deserved to be loved, but finding he could not attain to this on earth, the pious youth had endured a martyrdom of love.

St. Bernard was accustomed to renew his fervour in religion by repeating to himself this question, "Bernard, why art thou come hither?"* I ask you the same question: What are you come to do in the house of God? Why have you left the world? Is it that you may become a saint? What are you doing then? Why do you lose time? Tell me: Do you sincerely desire to become a saint? If you do not desire it, it is very certain you will never become one. If then you do not feel within you this desire, ask it of Jesus, ask it of Mary. But if you have it already, take courage, for says St. Bernard, "Many have not become saints, because they despaired of it." And therefore I repeat, have courage, and great courage. What have we to fear? What shall cast us down? That same Lord

* Bernarde ad quid venisti?

who gave us strength to leave the world, will by his grace enable us also to embrace the perfect life of the saints.

All things pass away. This life, be it happy or miserable, will also end; eternity alone will endure for ever. The little which we shall have done for God will alone console us in death and in eternity. Our sufferings will be but short; the crown, of which we can but catch a glimpse now, will last for ever. How joyfully the saints now regard those sufferings which they endured for God! If it were possible for any affliction to intrude in heaven, the only sorrow of those blessed souls would be, that they had omitted many things which they might have done for God, but for which no time now remains. Take courage then, and make haste, for you have no time to lose: what you can do to-day, you may not be able to accomplish to-morrow. St. Bernardine of Sienna used to say, that one single instant was worth as much as God himself; because in that instant it is possible for us to obtain God and his divine grace, or the greatest degrees of his grace.

CONSIDERATION X.

OF THE LOVE WE OWE TO JESUS CHRIST IN
RETURN FOR THE LOVE WHICH HE HAS
SHOWN US.

IN order to comprehend the love which the Son of God has had for us, we need only consider what St. Paul says of Jesus Christ: "He annihilated himself, taking the form of a slave. He humbled himself, being made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* He annihilated himself. O God! with what wonder were thy angels filled, and will be filled for all eternity, at beholding, that a God loved man so much as to become man himself, and to submit himself to all the weaknesses and all the sufferings of human nature! "And the word was made flesh."† What a wondrous thing it would be to see a king make himself a worm for the love of worms! And yet it is an infinitely greater marvel to see a God become man, and afterwards to behold him humbled even to the painful and ignominious death of the cross, upon which he ended his most sacred life. It

* Phil. ii. 7.

† John i. 14.

was when speaking of this death, that, according to the gospel, the holy prophets, Moses and Elias, on Mount Thabor, called it an excess.* “Yes,” says St. Bonaventure, “that death of Jesus Christ was with reason termed excess; for it was an excess of sorrow, and an excess of love; an excess which would never have been believed if it had not been accomplished.”† “An excess of love,” says St. Austin; “since the Son of God wished to come upon this earth, and lead so hard and painful a life, and to suffer so cruel a death, only that he might make them know how much he loved them.”‡ Our Lord revealed to his servant Armilla Nicolas, that his love for men was the sole cause of his sufferings and his death. If Jesus Christ had not been God, but only a simple man who had loved us, what greater proof of love could he have shown us than to die for us? Ah! at the thought of the love that Jesus Christ has shown for us, the Saints deemed it

* Dicebant excessum, quem completurus erat in Jerusalem. Luc. ix. 13.

† Excessus doloris excessus amoris.

‡ Propterea Christus advenit ut cognoscent homo, quantum eum diligit Deus.

§ Majorem hanc dilectionem nemo habet, ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis.

but little to sacrifice their own lives and every thing they possessed for a God so full of love. How many youths, how many noble and exalted persons, have abandoned their houses, their country, their riches, their relations, every thing in a word, that they might retire into a cloister, and live there solely for the love of Jesus Christ! How many young virgins, renouncing the alliance of princes and the great ones of the world, have gone joyfully to death, to make some return for the love which God bore to them by dying upon an infamous gibbet! a thing which appeared a folly to St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, who also calls Jesus Christ a fool of love. "Yes," she cried, "yes, my Jesus, thou art a fool of love." So also the Gentiles, as St. Paul attests, on hearing the death of Jesus Christ preached, considered it foolishness which it was impossible to believe.* "How," said they, "could a God, who was essentially happy in himself, and did not depend on any other being, die for the love of men who were his slaves! To believe this we must suppose that God had become a

* Prædicantur Christum crucifixum, Judæis quidem scandalum, gentibus autem stultitiam. 1 Cor. i. 23.

fool for the love of men." And yet it is of faith, that Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, delivered himself up to death for the love of us.* It was with reason that St. Mary Magdalen exclaimed, lamenting the ingratitude of men towards so loving a God: "O forgotten love! O love not loved!" Yes, the only reason why men do not love Jesus Christ, is because they live in forgetfulness of his love for them.

Ah, it is certain, that a soul who considers that a God has died for love of her, cannot live without loving him. The charity of Jesus Christ presses us.† She feels herself all on fire, and, as it were, constrained to love God who has so loved her. "Jesus could have redeemed us with one single drop of his blood," said F. Nieremberg, "but he desired to expend it all, and his divine life with it, that the sight of his sorrows and his death might enkindle in us a more than ordinary love towards him, and that we might be sweetly forced to love with all our strength a God so full of love to us."‡

* Dilexit nos et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis. Ephes. v. 2.

† 2 Cor. v. 14.

‡ Ut qui vivunt, non jam sibi vivant, sed ei qui pro ipsis mortuus est. 2 Cor. v. 15.

CONSIDERATION XI.

OF THE GREAT HAPPINESS WHICH RELIGIOUS
POSSESS IN DWELLING WITH JESUS IN THE
SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

THE venerable Mother Mary of Jesus, foundress of an order at Toulouse, said there were two things which made her feel the happiness of being a religious; the first was, that religious belong entirely to God by the vow of obedience; the second, was on account of the grace vouchsafed them, of dwelling continually with Jesus in the blessed eucharist. And if worldlings consider themselves happy when they are called by kings to reside in their palaces, what joy ought religious to feel when admitted to reside constantly with the King of heaven in his holy dwelling!

In religious houses Jesus Christ is always waiting in his church that his children may find him at all times. Seculars have a difficulty in visiting him at all times of the day, and in some places can only do so in the morning. But the religious may watch with him at all times; in the morning, during the day,

and at night. There he can converse continually with his Lord, and there Jesus Christ loves to converse familiarly with his servants whom he has redeemed from Egypt, to gladden them with his sacramental presence in this life, and in the next with the vision of himself unveiled in Paradise. O solitude! may we say in a religious house, O happy solitude! where God speaks to his friends and holds sweet converse with them.* Those souls who ardently love Jesus Christ desire no other Paradise in this world, than to kneel before their Lord in the holy sacrament, where he remains for the love of those who seek and visit him. His conversation has no bitterness in it, nor has his company any tediousness.† He alone is weary of being with Jesus Christ who does not love him; but the soul that has placed all its affections in Jesus Christ, finds in the adorable Sacrament all its treasure, its repose, and its Paradise, and therefore is always desirous to visit and remain as much as possible with God present upon the altar; at

* O solitudo! in qua Deus cum suis familiariter loquitur et conversatur.

† Non habet amaritudinem conversatio illius, nec tædium convictus illius. *Wisd.* viii. 16.

the foot of which he casts down his affections, his troubles, and his ardent desires, to behold his Lord face to face, and in the meanwhile to please him in all things.

CONSIDERATION XII.

THE LIFE OF A RELIGIOUS IS OF ALL OTHERS
THE MOST LIKE THAT OF JESUS CHRIST.

THE apostle has said, that the eternal Father has predestined to the kingdom of heaven those only who conform their lives to the Incarnate Word.* How happy therefore ought religious to be, and with what confidence should they hope for Paradise, seeing that God has called them to a state of life the most conformable to that of Jesus Christ! Now, Jesus desired to live poor in this world, as a simple labourer in the shop of his father; in a poor cottage, poorly clothed and poorly fed: being rich, says the apostle, he became poor for the love of thee, in order that thou mightest become rich by his

* Quos præscivit, et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui. Rom. viii. 29.

poverty.* Moreover, he embraced a life full of mortifications, far removed from the pleasures of the world, and in the constant endurance of suffering and misery from his birth until his death; therefore the prophets called him a man of sorrows.† Thus he taught his servants what ought to be the life of those who desire to follow him: "Whoever wishes to come after me, ought to renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me."‡ To copy this example, to accept this invitation of Jesus Christ, the saints were perpetually employed in divesting themselves of all earthly goods, and in seeking for sufferings and crosses by which to follow their beloved Lord. Thus did St. Bennet, who was descended from the lords of Norcia, and kinsmen of the emperor Justinian, born amidst the riches and the refinements of the world, when he was scarcely fourteen years old, went to live in a grotto on Mount Sublâcus, where he received no other sustenance than a morsel of bread

* Propter nos egenus factus est, cum esset dives ut illius inopia vos divites essetis. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

† Vir dolorum. Is. liii. 3.

‡ Si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam et sequatur me. Matt. xvi. 24.

brought him by a charitable monk of Rome. Thus also we see St. Francis of Assisium, giving up to his father all that he possessed, even his last garment, and thus poor and mortified consecrating himself entirely to Jesus Christ. And so also St. Francis Borgia and a St. Louis Gonzaga, one having been duke of Candia, and the other lord of Castiglione, abandoned their riches, estates, vassals, country, home, and relations, to live as poor men in a religious community. And many other noble persons and princes, even of royal blood, have done the same. Blessed Zedmerra, daughter of a king of Ethiopia, renounced the throne that she might become a nun of the order of St. Dominick. Blessed Jane of Portugal gave up the crowns of France and England in order to embrace a religious life. In the order of St. Benedict alone there have been twenty-five emperors, and seventy-five kings or queens, who left the world to live poor and mortified and forgotten on earth in an obscure monastery. Oh yes! these, and not the great ones of the world, are truly happy: now, they are regarded by worldlings as foolish; but in the valley of Josaphat these will discover that it was themselves who were

foolish, when they shall see the saints upon their thrones crowned by the hand of God; and they will exclaim in accents of lamentation and despair, "These are they whom formerly we had in derision. Fools that we were, their life appeared to us a folly, and behold they are seated among the children of God, and their lot is with the saints!" *

CONSIDERATION XIII.

OF THE ZEAL WHICH RELIGIOUS SHOULD HAVE
FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS.

He who is called to the congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, will never become a true follower of Jesus Christ nor a saint, unless he fulfils the end of his vocation, and cultivates the spirit of that Religious Institution which is to labour for the salvation of souls, and principally the souls of the poor who are most destitute of spiritual aid. This was the sole motive of the coming of our Saviour as he himself has declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; wherefore he hath

* Wisd. v. 3, &c.

anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.”* And therefore we see that He required no other proof of St. Peter’s love than that of devoting himself to the salvation of souls. “Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?...then feed my sheep.”† “He did not impose,” says St. John Chrysostom, “penances, or prayers, or any other such practices, but he required only that he should labour to save his flock.”‡ And in another place Jesus declared that he would regard as done to himself whatever we should do to the humblest of our brethren.§

Therefore every religious should cultivate carefully within himself a great zeal and desire for assisting souls. And to this end each ought to direct all his care; and when superiors employ him in this service, he should devote all his thoughts and attention to it. He cannot be truly called a brother of the congregation unless he embraces these duties with ardour (when obedience imposes them up-

* Luke iv. 1

† Simon Joannis, diligis me?...pasce oves meas. John xxi. 17.

‡ Non dixit Christus, abjice pecunias, jejunium exerce, macera te laboribus, sed dixit: Pasce oves meas.

§ Amen dico vobis, quamdiu fecistis uni ex fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis. Matt. xxv. 40.

on him,) not preferring to consider himself, and to lead a life of solitude and retirement. And what greater glory can a man have than to be the co-operator with God, as St. Paul says, in the great work of saving souls? Whoever truly loves our Lord will not content himself with loving him himself, but he will desire to draw all mankind to this love, saying with David, "Magnify the Lord with me, and let us extol his name together."* And so St. Augustine addresses this exhortation to all who love God, "If you love God, seek to draw all men to this holy love."† Now we have great reason to hope for eternal salvation if we labour with true zeal to save souls. "You have saved one soul," says St. Augustine, "you have predestined your own."‡ And the Holy Ghost makes this promise: "When you shall pour out your soul to the hungry—*Cum effuderis esurienti animam tuam*—when you shall have laboured hard for the spiritual good of the poor, and shall satisfy the afflicted soul—*et animam afflictam repleveris*—and by your efforts

* Magnificate Dominum me cum, et exaltemus nomen ejus. Ps. xxxiii. 4.

† Si Deum amatis, omnes ad amorem ejus rapite.

‡ Animam salvasti, animam tuam, prædestinasti.

have filled his soul with divine grace, then shall your light rise up in darkness, and the Lord will give you rest—*implebit splendoribus animam tuam, requiem dabit tibi Dominus*—the Lord will fill you with light and peace.” St. Paul placed all his hope of eternal salvation in the salvation that he had procured for others; and therefore he says to his disciples of Thessalonica, “What is our hope, our joy, and the crown of our glory? Is it not you who are before the Lord Jesus Christ?”*

CONSIDERATION XIV.

HOW NECESSARY THE VIRTUES OF MEEKNESS
AND HUMILITY ARE TO A RELIGIOUS.

OUR adorable Redeemer Jesus Christ would be called “the lamb,” that we might understand how meek and humble he was. And these are the virtues which he principally desires his disciples to learn of him:† and these he requires more particularly in religious, who profess to imi-

* Quæ est enim nostra spes et corona gloriæ, nonne vos ante Dominum Jesum Christum? 1 The. ii. 19.

† Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde. Matt. xi. 29.

tate his holy life. One who leads a solitary life in the desert has not so great need of these virtues, but the religious who lives in community cannot avoid meeting either with reproaches from his superiors, or annoyances from his companions: and if he does not apply himself earnestly to the practice of patience, he will fall every day into a thousand faults, and lead a most unhappy life. He must be full of gentleness towards all, with strangers, with his companions, and with his inferiors, if he should ever be placed over any; remembering that if he overcomes himself he will merit more by a single act of meekness under contempt or reproaches, than by a thousand fasts or disciplines.

St. Francis has remarked, that many persons make their perfection to consist in exterior mortifications, whilst at the same time, they cannot put up with a single offensive word: They do not understand, he adds, how much greater profit there is in bearing injuries patiently.* How many are there, says St. Bernard, who are all sweetness when nothing is said or done contrary to their wishes; but if on the other hand any thing occurs to con-

* Non intelligentis quanto majus sit lucrum in tolerantia injuriarum.

tradict them, they show directly how small their stock of meekness is. And let any one who is placed in the office of superior, know that he will succeed better with his subjects by a single correction made with mildness, than by a hundred reproaches made with severity. He who is meek, says St. John Chrysostom, is useful to himself and to others.* In a word, as the same Saint teaches us elsewhere ; the most evident sign of virtue in a soul, is when it practises meekness and patience on every occasion. A meek heart is that which is agreeable to the Lord.† It is good that the religious should imagine to himself in his meditations whatever may happen to disturb him, and so prepare himself before hand to meet it ; and when these occasions arise, he must conquer himself that they may not distress him, or be an occasion of impatience. For this end he should refrain from speaking when his soul is disturbed, until peace returns.

But in order to bear injuries with tranquillity, it is necessary above all things, to have a great fund of humility. He who is truly humble, is never troubled

* *Mansuetus utilis sibi et aliis.*

† *Beneplacitum est illi fides et mansuetudo. Eccl. i. 34. 35.*

when he sees himself despised, but on the contrary is pleased and rejoices in spirit, however the flesh may resist, because he finds himself treated as he believes he deserves, and moreover, he is made thereby more like to Jesus Christ, who although worthy of all glory, yet for love of us desired to be filled with reproaches and humiliations. Brother Juniper, the disciple of St. Francis, when any one offered him an insult, used to hold up his habit as though he were about to receive pearls from heaven. The saints have been more covetous of humiliations, than worldlings are of praises and honours. And what is a religious good for who cannot endure a contemptuous word for God's sake? He will be always a proud man, or humble only in name and like hypocrites; and to such, we are assured by the words of the Holy Ghost, divine grace will be refused: God resists the proud, but he gives his grace to the humble. 1 Peter, v. 5.

CONSIDERATION XV.

OF THE CONFIDENCE RELIGIOUS OUGHT TO
HAVE IN THE PROTECTION OF MARY.

If it is true, and indeed it is most true, that, as St. Peter Damian says, the mo-

ther of God, blessed Mary, loves all men with so great affection, that after God there is not, nor can there be, any being who surpasses or even equals her in love for us.* How great may we think is the love which this great queen entertains for religious, who have sacrificed their liberty, their life, in a word, whatever they possess for the love of Jesus Christ! She sees with satisfaction that their life is most like her own, and that of her divine Son. She beholds them often engaged in singing her praises, and intent on doing her honour by novenas, visits, rosaries, fasts, &c. She sees them frequently at her feet, invoking her with ardour, and begging graces; and these graces which they ask, are all conformable to her own holy desires; such as perseverance in the service of God, strength against temptations, detachment from earth, and union with God. Oh! how can we doubt that she will employ all her power and all her clemency in favour of religious, and particularly for us of this congregation of the most holy Redeemer, where we make a special profession, as you know, by honouring the Virgin Mother by visits, the fast of

* Amat nos amore invincibili.

Saturday, and particular mortifications in her novenas, &c. and, in fine, by spreading the devotion to her, by sermons and novenas in her honour?

Great and powerful, she is also full of gratitude. I love, does she say to us, those who love me.* So that, as St. Andrew of Crete says, she returns great benefit to him who offers her the least homage.† She promises to deliver from the chains of sin whoever honours her himself, and endeavours to make others do the same.‡ Moreover she promises Paradise to such a one.§ How thankful then we should be to God for having called us to religion, where, by the instructions of our superiors and by the example of our brethren, we are so often admonished, and, as it were, constrained to have recourse to Mary, and to honour continually this affectionate mother, who is called, and who really is, the joy, the hope, the life, and salvation of those who invoke and honour her!

* Ego diligentes me, diligo. Prov. viii. 17.

† Solet maxima pro mininis reddere.

‡ Qui operantur in me, non peccabunt. Sect. 3. in Off. Concept. B. V.

§ Qui elucidant me, vitam æternam habebunt. Ibid.



